



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Kennedy, Ryan Announce Upcoming ‘Summit for Smarter Schools’ as First Step in Pursuit of Smarter School Reform

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY September 5, 2013

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WNY lawmakers want reform of high-stakes testing of young children, look to community for input.

Kennedy, Ryan, Maziarz to host summit October 2 at Kleinhans, bringing together diverse stakeholders to hold substantive discussion of potential reforms for smarter schools across region and state.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy and Assemblyman Sean Ryan announced plans for the upcoming “Summit for Smarter Schools” where a diverse set of stakeholders will gather for a substantive conversation about smart reform and the future of our schools. Kennedy

and Ryan will be joined by Senator George Maziarz and the Partnership for Smarter Schools to host the summit Wednesday, October 2 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Kleinhans Music Hall.

Across Western New York, children returned to school this week and are already preparing for a new round of high-stakes testing. At the Summit for Smarter Schools, the discussions will focus on the use and impact of standardized testing in an effort to help de-emphasize the high stakes nature of these tests.

Today, Buffalo Public School 76 Herman Badillo Bilingual Academy – which was bustling with activity as students start the new academic year – served as the backdrop for the announcement, where Kennedy and Ryan described the upcoming summit as a forum to critically examine education issues from a regional and statewide perspective. The state lawmakers called the Summit for Smarter Schools an important next step and an opportunity to gather facts as they launch pursuit of smarter school reform with a specific focus on high-stakes testing of children.

Senator Tim Kennedy said, “Parents are growing more and more concerned about the impact of high-stakes testing on their children. Ten years ago, New York State third-graders were required to take 625 minutes of state exams, which is a lot of time for kids that age. Now, the state has rolled out another round of exams that require kids from grades three through eight to sit through a whopping 3,200 minutes worth of tests. Our students deserve an education that will instill a love of learning, not just test-taking strategies. There is no question testing has its place, but we need to get it right. Appropriate, reliable testing will help us ensure students are learning the skills they need to achieve academic excellence without over-testing and over-stressing young children. The Summit for Smarter Schools offers an opportunity for parents, teachers and our community to get involved and share ideas from the onset of our reform efforts.”

Assemblyman Sean Ryan said, “The concerns over high-stakes testing have been growing, and more unanswered questions are arising each day. The Summit for Smarter Schools will be an opportunity for the Western New York community to discuss high-stakes testing, and the impact it has on our children, families, and our educational system. With a topic that is this important, a discussion will help to figure out ways to properly assess students, and teachers, and ensure that New York schools are offering the best educational experience possible. If you are concerned about the impact of high-stakes testing, I urge you to attend this important community event.”

Senator George Maziarz said, “Our educators and administrators are in classrooms and schools working with students every day. When they say heavy-handed standardized tests aren’t effective, we should listen. We all want what’s best for our children, so we need to work together to develop the right approach gauging students’ success in learning. Hopefully this Summit will lead to ideas for crafting a more balanced approach.”

Dr. Mark Crawford, superintendent of West Seneca Central School District and a leader within the Partnership for Smarter Schools, laid out the case for smarter school reform and encouraged residents to learn more about the upcoming Summit for Smarter Schools.

“We are opposed to the current iteration of New York State’s high-stakes testing,” Crawford said. “These tests are not valid, nor are they reliable in terms of testing protocols – and that’s because students were tested on materials they never received in class. In addition, these tests are neither diagnostic, nor prescriptive – which means we don’t get useful feedback informing parents and teachers where children mastered material and where they did not. There is no information provided explaining which areas of study a child is weak. However, we are not opposed to standardized testing. When testing is valid and reliable and when there is constructive feedback provided to parents and teachers in a timely manner, the testing results are highly useful and desirable.”

The Summit for Smarter Schools will bring together community leaders, education professionals, public officials and parents to discuss needed reforms to ensure schools in Western New York and across the state are gearing children with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century global economy. Kennedy and Ryan expect the summit to lead to new smarter schools reform legislation, which they'll pursue in the next legislative session in Albany. The lawmakers say smarter schools reform must offer research-based steps to address the systemic challenges that confront public education in New York State.

The Partnership for Smarter Schools, a grassroots organization that formed last year for the purpose of studying the current set of New York State Education Department reform initiatives, has teamed up with the lawmakers to host the summit. The Partnership comprises parents, school board members, school superintendents, teachers, university professors and school principals from all over Western New York. To date, the organization has over 500 individual members. They are dedicated to working with policymakers to help students learn the skills required to achieve academic and professional success.

For more information on the summit and for ticket information, visit

www.PartnershipForSmarterSchools.org. Several tickets will also be available the night of the event at Kleinhans.

Senator Kennedy also announced the launch of a [new page](#) on his website, <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>, where parents and community members can share their input on what must be done to improve schools throughout Western New York and New York State. Western New Yorkers are encouraged to visit Senator Kennedy's website and click on the smarter schools reform icon on the left side of the page. [There, stakeholders can submit thoughts and ideas on necessary educational reforms.](#)

In June, [Senator Kennedy penned an op-ed in the Buffalo News](#) that urged the state to shift the focus away from high-stakes test-taking and begin working to instill a love of learning in students across New York.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.