



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

Summit for Smarter Schools is widely attended

GEORGE D. MAZIARZ October 3, 2013

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

Senator George Maziarz, Senator Tim Kennedy, and Assemblyman Sean Ryan last night hosted the “Summit for Smarter Schools” where a diverse set of stakeholders gathered for a substantive conversation about smarter schools reform and the future of education in New York State. A capacity crowd of over 2,000 people is expected to attend the Summit at Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo.

Across Western New York, children returned to school last month and are already preparing for a new round of high-stakes testing. At the Summit for Smarter Schools, the discussion focused on the use and impact of standardized testing in an effort to help de-emphasize the high-stakes nature of these tests. The state lawmakers called the Summit for Smarter Schools an important, first step and an opportunity to gather facts as they launch pursuit of statewide smarter schools reform with a specific focus on high-stakes testing of children.

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.”

Senator Tim Kennedy said, “Every day, I hear from parents and teachers about the damaging effects of high-pressure, high-stakes tests. Children are losing out on instructional time in all

subjects, from science to foreign languages. Instead of enriching classroom instruction, children go through test-taking drills. There's no question that testing has its place, but we need to it right. Appropriate, reliable testing will help us ensure students are learning the skills they need to achieve academic success without over-testing and over-stressing young children. After connecting with parents, educators, experts and our community at the Summit for Smarter Schools, we are on track to devise and pursue solutions to the challenges our schools face. We are taking action in this fight to get testing right."

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 is 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. Tonight we discussed 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 contact the Board of Regents and let them know that New York has to implement smart reform in order to get testing right."

Dr. Mark Crawford, superintendent of West Seneca Central School District and a leader within the Partnership for Smarter Schools, laid out the case for smart education reform and made clear why Summit for Smarter Schools is such an important first step.

"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 brought 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 equipping children with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century global economy. The lawmakers expect the summit to lead to the development of new reform legislation, which they'll pursue in the next legislative session in Albany.

The Partnership for Smarter Schools has outlined four priorities for smart reform. They are calling for smarter student assessment, smarter evaluations of principals and teachers, smarter professional development and smarter research and data. More information about smarter schools reform can be found at www.PartnershipForSmarterSchools.org. At the summit, attendees were urged to take action and send postcards to leaders within the New York State Education Department asking them to pursue smart reform and get testing right.

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.

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