



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS October 15, 2013

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

Common Core But No Common Sense

Make no bones about it. I have been consumed with nonstop questions and concerns regarding the state education department's rollout of the Common Core curriculum. I'm approached by constituents with questions at almost every event I attend in our district. But more than answer questions, I've been trying to listen because it's abundantly clear to me that people are truly upset. There's something wrong and they want something to be done.

To resolve this issue is going to take time and a whole lot of patience. That's why I was so flabbergasted this past week when State Education Commissioner Dr. John King Jr. announced he was suspending his scheduled town hall meetings to discuss the roll out of Common Core and answer questions. Apparently, the commissioner was challenged by concerned parents and teachers at a town hall meeting upstate. Blaming "special interests" (i.e. concerned parents) for what he felt was an unconstructive atmosphere, he chose to suspend subsequent meetings including the Long Island event that was to be held right here in Garden City. This was an incredibly poor decision on his part. Anyone involved in government must understand that just because you don't like the score, doesn't mean you can take your bat and your ball and go home. This is especially true as Dr. King not only chose the game, he set the rules by which our children will be gauged. It's wrong.

Let's be frank, our communities are paying some of the highest taxes in the nation to educate their children who are suddenly failing in droves under the Common Core. In fact, an August 7th Education Department report revealed that a whopping 60% of students in grades 3 through 8 on Long Island scored below proficiency, nearly double the amount from the year prior! The scores are wrong and some have speculated that they've been manipulated. Naturally, parents are panicking. And whether he likes it or not, as Education Commissioner, the buck stops with him. It's his plan.

So the appropriate response would be to assure parents that their concerns are not falling on deaf ears and then to begin the clearly necessary work of addressing the problems with input from everyone. Ignoring parents when they voice concern for their children's wellbeing compounds the problem and only confirms for them their sentiment that the Education Department is acting without regard for the very people it should be serving.

Yet it's not too late to set things right. It can't be.

As I've noted before, embracing the higher standards of Common Core is worthwhile but it should have been rolled out gradually, allowing students the opportunity of growing with the new curriculum instead of callously blindsiding so many without preparation. The damage to student confidence and personal progress may be irreparable, to say nothing of the disadvantage of inferior grades that do not accurately reflect ability. It has to be fixed. Hopefully our Board of Regents and Education Department have the humility to accept that and the wherewithal to see it through.

At the moment New York needs a caring pragmatist willing to address real concerns raised by caring parents and educators who see a system being manipulated from above to the detriment of their children. Unfortunately, we have John King. He should immediately reschedule these forums or he should immediately resign.

