



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo Joins WITH Committee Colleagues in Questioning State Education Commissioner About Implementation of Controversial Common Core Learning Standards

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR January 27, 2014

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Queens, NY (January 27, 2014): During a very lengthy and occasionally contentious Senate Education Committee meeting with NYS Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr., NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens) and his colleagues posed serious questions to the Commissioner about the implementation of the controversial “Common Core” learning standards in New York schools, and expressed their concerns about excessive testing, how the tests affect teacher evaluations, the privacy of student data, and a number of other related issues.

“Commissioner King certainly received a lot of feedback from Senate Education Committee members who, like me, have been contacted repeatedly by constituents, parents and educators who are deeply concerned about the haphazard implementation of these standards and how they are affecting the learning experiences of our children,” Addabbo said. “Committee members made it clear that they would like to see Common Core delayed, overhauled, and implemented in a way that will achieve its goal of preparing children for college and careers without making 12 years of K-12 education a nightmare for students, parents and educators alike.”

Commissioner King told the senators that the State Education Department is indeed reviewing the implementation of Common Core – which he called “not easy” and “uneven across the state” – with the hope of releasing recommendations for improvement in February. He noted that some of the standardized testing, a major point of contention, is federally mandated and is not actually a part of Common Core itself. Education Committee members, however, pointed out that it is difficult to separate the testing issue from the new standards, particularly since the tests are being used to determine how well teachers are instilling the new learning standards in their students.

Addabbo said he believes that imposing Common Core standards and related testing on children in kindergarten and other low elementary school grades is inappropriate, particularly since pre-kindergarten is not mandatory for all children and would leave some very young students at a disadvantage in relation to their peers. “It would be more rational to begin introducing the new learning standards and tests to children in higher grades,” he said, noting that Governor Cuomo has proposed excluding students in kindergarten through second grade from the testing. The Commissioner told the Committee that New York State is seeking a waiver from the federal government in order to achieve this reform.

Addabbo also questioned Commissioner King about student privacy issues, including the security of personal information that would be warehoused by InBloom, a private company that has contracted with the State Education Department to create a huge database of student information. Under the agreement, student names, attendance records, disciplinary histories, addresses, test scores and more are required to be delivered to the state and then provided to InBloom for the database. The data is made accessible to school districts and third party vendors that contract with schools to manage the information.

“Commissioner King promised to look into the issue, including the cost of using InBloom, and also said that the student information is not distributed, shared or used for Common

Core evaluations and is only used within school districts,” Addabbo noted. “However, we need to know much more about this issue: identity theft is no joke and I am very uncomfortable with the possibility that the security of this extensive personal student and family information could be compromised.” The Senator also pointed out that six states that initially partnered with InBloom to warehouse their student data have ended their relationships with the company, leaving only New York, Massachusetts and Illinois with contracts.

Other points made to Commissioner King included concern that Common Core is expected to be fully implemented by 2017, and that this timeframe only provides three years to make improvements to what many believe is a deeply flawed and highly confusing endeavor. In addition, a recommendation was made that completed and scored Common Core-related tests be returned to students, teachers and parents so that they can understand why a student did or didn't do well; right now, no one is able to see the actual individual tests after they are taken to assess the results.

“I and other members of the Senate Education Committee await the State Education Department's recommendations for Common Core improvements next month, but it is clear that the State Legislature is ready and willing to make even greater legislative changes if the circumstances warrant it,” Addabbo said, noting that he is also going to recommend that a series of statewide parent workshops be convened to enable parents to better assist their children with the new learning standards.

“In the final analysis, we all want our children to succeed as adults, and being able to compete effectively in college and in the career marketplace is certainly key to this goal,” Addabbo said. “There is nothing at all wrong with the ultimate aim of the Common Core learning standards, but there is a whole lot wrong with the way they are being rolled out. No one wins – not our children, our parents, our teachers, our administrators, or our state as a

whole – if we create a system that all too often seems to be setting up students and educators to fail.”

Addabbo is planning a number of Common Core Town Hall Meetings, where parents, teachers, administrators and other interested individuals can give input on the issue. The first Town Hall is scheduled for Thursday, February 13, 2014 from 7-9pm at PS 232 in Howard Beach. The Senator added that he looks forward to continuing the discussion about Common Core and will continue to make the concerns of many known as work continues in the State Legislature to address and correct flaws in the federal academic requirements.