



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins: It's the Same Old Song

JACK M. MARTINS March 20, 2014

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Can you hear it? Listen closely and you'll recognize the harmony of thousands of voices woefully singing, "It's the Same Old Song" by the Four Tops. They're parents from Buffalo to Montauk singing because the New York City-led state assembly voted to return three of the four Board of Regents members to their positions this past week. And the fourth one was only replaced because he resigned. That just about locks him in as the smartest member as far as I'm concerned, because he realized he was in over his head.

In case you're not familiar, the Board of Regents is New York's 17-member board that dictates education policy to school districts across the state as well as shapes procedures at universities, adult education programs, and even manages the licensing of professionals like architects and dentists. They wield an enormous amount of power but have done so for years under the radar. This tone-deaf crowd is also responsible for the disastrous rollout of the Common Core that has become the bane of parents, educators, and students alike. That's why I voted 'no' to reappointing all the incumbent Board of Regents members who were seeking another term. Unfortunately, too many of my fellow legislators were content to let sleeping dogs lie.

After a year that can only be described as an education meltdown, with students failing standardized tests in droves and thousands of concerned New Yorkers angrily demanding

change, your representatives had an opportunity to deliver real improvement. There was an opening with this most recent board election to select new, more responsive members with fresh perspectives but the occasion was utterly wasted by an ineffectual New York Assembly. They carry the majority of votes in the matter and despite our relentless pleas for this small but significant shift, they chose to rubber stamp the board and keep the status quo.

I don't know how they'll face their constituents. I've personally heard from thousands of parents about the Common Core rollout over the last several months. Not a single one said that it was positive. They're angry, frustrated, and disgusted with the way the Regents and the State Education Department has handled this process and the effect it's had on their children. And as a parent of four daughters still in school, I totally agree. We're especially disappointed that these Regents supported the State Education Department's contract with inBloom, the sharing of our students' data without regard to their privacy. They added insult to injury by spending \$50 million to develop a sign-on portal and related technology to support the misguided initiative. When other states were bowing out, these Regents were doubling down.

These faint-hearted officials assure us that the vote "put a good scare into the board" and that it "sent them a message." Nothing could be further from the truth. Returning these members after this complete and utter debacle of a year tells them that they're absolutely safe, that they remain unaccountable, and that they will go unchallenged. Keep in mind some board members have served for much too long, one for 19 uncontested years! Can we really expect this entrenched group to be open to change? Anyone who tells you that we can is being disingenuous.

No, for real change to occur we must begin at the beginning, and that means removing the obstacles to our children's common sense progress. In this case, that means the Board of

Regents who not only put the disastrous Common Core in motion but sat idly by while it wreaked havoc. Since the Assembly has made them untouchable, my colleagues and I in the Senate will be working to pass legislation to try and set things right. In the meantime, Regents backers will be singing the same old song.