



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS June 4, 2015

The “Do-Over”

Summer is upon us and I can’t help but think back nostalgically to our youth. Those wonderfully long summer evenings, playing in the street with our friends. You’ll recall that no matter the game, there was always the possibility of the magical “do-over.” There might be a quick meeting on the manhole cover just to build consensus, then someone would declare “do-over!” and so began a new game. Children were and still are hard-wired to understand that sometimes even the most well thought out plans just get screwed up and that the best response is to start over with no fuss, no muss.

Several weeks ago I wrote that I was asking for a “do-over” of sorts for New York State education policy. Common Core, the dramatic move toward more standardized testing, and poorly planned teacher evaluations have been nothing short of a train wreck. For six whole years we in Albany have tried repeatedly to correct, and negotiate, and cajole, and rework infinite details and for all our head banging all we have are anxious kids, angry parents, and uninspired teachers. I think it’s more than safe to say that we aren’t going to fix this train while it’s in motion. What should be done is a moratorium period– a pause if you will – that allows us to regroup, keep what’s good, throw out what’s bad and start over from the beginning. This new approach has authentic support among Republicans and Democrats alike in both the Senate and the Assembly but I will bluntly tell you that such action won’t

be possible without a State Education Commissioner who can show true leadership, the kind that admits mistakes and stands up against the status quo.

That quality is incredibly rare though, especially in the face of such entrenched bureaucracies and it certainly wasn't the position of former Education Commissioner, Dr. John King, who I routinely tangled with over these issues. In that light, the New York Board of Regents has unanimously appointed a Ms. MaryEllen Elia as the state's new Education Commissioner. Ms. Elia is a career educator who hails from Western New York where she taught outside of Buffalo for ten years before becoming superintendent of the Hillsborough County School system in Florida, a very large district that includes the greater Tampa area. In 2015 she was named Florida superintendent of the year and was recognized as one of four finalists for National Superintendent of the Year. Her reputation is one of inclusiveness and a willingness to listen to all stakeholders, a dramatic turnaround from Dr. King to be sure.

That being said I remain cautiously optimistic at best and I refuse to mince words. While I welcome Ms. Elia and look forward to working with her, I want to go on the record from the outset as being in favor of dramatic change, change that will most certainly make her job difficult. But should Ms. Elia be willing to take on the powers that be, should she be willing to roll up her sleeves and begin the tedious work of rebuilding, she can count me among her allies along with the millions of children, parents and teachers who look to her with great hope.

Ms. Elia, you have extraordinary opportunity to shape the education experience of hundreds of thousands of young New Yorkers and to help them love to learn. You have the opportunity to build a system that recognizes that no one loves these children more than their parents which makes them educators in their own right, with real and valuable input. You have the opportunity to inspire thousands of present and future teachers and to help them to again find honest fulfillment in their efforts. The ball is yours and we're all right

here, waiting at the manhole cover. We just need you to yell, “do-over!”