



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

## From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS November 12, 2015

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

Those of you reading this column who have significant others already know that you learn an awful lot of life's lessons the hard way when you settle down with someone. My lovely bride of 20 years would likely tell you that I've learned very little but I will say there is one idea that I know applies to everyone in everyday life: when you're wrong, admit it and move on. Bad situations never improve if you're stubbornly clinging to your point of view (I can't wait until she reads this!).

Case in point would be New York State's disastrous experiment with Common Core. You'll recall that in my June column earlier this year, I challenged the state's new Education Commissioner, MaryEllen Elia, **to initiate an adult version of the "do-over."** I wrote:

*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.*

Quite bluntly, after meeting with hundreds of parents, teachers and students, writing about it dozens of times, and clashing so publicly with the former education commissioner, Dr. John King Jr., it was obvious to me that Common Core just wasn't working. As your state senator I initially tried to find ways that it could be salvaged. After all, the experts kept telling us that this enormously expensive experiment would somehow work out in the end.

But I immediately collided with and eventually [called for the resignation of a tone-deaf Dr. King](#). Then I held town hall meetings for local parents that [only fell on deaf ears in Albany](#). I had to make sense of the [inBloom data fiasco](#) that compromised the privacy of our children (fortunately the State eventually came to its senses and halted its relationship with inBloom). I even took issue with the [cookie cutter curriculum](#). It seemed nothing about this plan worked but in the end, I've simply had too many long nights at the kitchen table with at least one of my frustrated children, too many mornings at school drop-off listening to angry neighbors, and too many meetings with down-trodden teachers and superintendents. We all want higher standards and certainly the original aim was worthy but you know what roads are paved with good intentions. So I couldn't help but ask, "What in the world are we doing?"

Dare I say I now see a bit of light at the end of this tunnel? This past week, the Governor's "Common Core Task Force" finally held public hearings asking New Yorkers how to improve it. The answer they're hearing across the board? Dump it. By and large witnesses are testifying that it's a complete failure on so many levels that they won't be satisfied with incremental change, they simply want it to end. For many, that's a bitter pill to swallow and it's certainly a herculean task to turn a ship this big around. But more than that, I think pride has played a far greater role in this unwillingness to change than it should have. Amazing as it sounds, some people just don't want to give up on what was supposed to be a "big idea" that was going to change the face of education. But as Winston Churchill, the clear-sighted Prime Minister of Britain once noted, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and

“speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

Here's hoping that courage soon finds its voice in Albany, that we admit it was a mistake so we can move on.