

MARC PANEPINTO
60TH SENATE DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE
ROOM 302
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
PHONE: (518) 455-2760
FAX: (518) 426-6760

DISTRICT OFFICE
ROOM 213 MAHONEY STATE OFFICE BLDG.
65 COURT STREET
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14202
PHONE: (716) 854-8705
FAX: (716) 854-3051



THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
AGRICULTURE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COMMITTEES:
CODES
HEALTH
HOUSING
INSURANCE
TRANSPORTATION
VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY & MILITARY AFFAIRS

March 27, 2015

Acting Commissioner Elizabeth Berlin
New York State Education Department
Education Building
89 Washington Ave.
Albany, NY 12234

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor, State of New York
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Acting Commissioner Berlin:

I am writing to express my deep concern with the aggressive actions that the Governor's office and the State Education Department have displayed over the past 48 hours regarding the Kenmore-Tonawanda School Board.

The Kenmore-Tonawanda School Board is an independent, duly-elected body, entrusted with the task of serving the needs of their students; educators; and the thousands of concerned parents and families who elected them. That is exactly what is transpiring with the Board's recent decision to "seriously consider" boycotting teacher evaluations and standardized testing until the issues over proper testing implementation and adequate state aid are addressed. This is evidenced by the overwhelming community support demonstrated with their 281-22 straw vote in favor of the proposal.

Furthermore, it is extremely concerning that a group of public-servants advocating solely on behalf of those they represent are being threatened for doing what they were elected to do – stand up for the people they serve. Sending essentially a "cease and desist" letter to the President of the Board was the wrong message to send the people of the Kenmore-Tonawanda school district.

The battle over public education has been a very intense and delicate one. All across New York, we are seeing a movement calling on the State to not use the budget as a tool to dictate an ill-vetted education agenda. In the case of the Kenmore-Tonawanda School Board, this could have

been an opportunity for the State to initiate significant dialogue with deeply concerned parents and teachers. Instead, this situation has escalated into warnings of removing board members and cutting off essential school funding.

We need to find common ground and end the threatening tone that has taken the place of constructive dialogue. Let's start there, and begin to work with the taxpayers, families, and teachers of Western New York and across the state, to achieve meaningful consensus over the future of public education for our children.

As the Senator representing the Kenmore-Tonawanda School District, I stand with my community and ask that the State Education Department and Governor's office work with us to make this possible.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Panepinto". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Marc C. Panepinto
New York State Senator
60th Senate District

CC: Cosimo Tangorra, Jr., Ed.D, Deputy Commissioner