

# **Budget Hearing on Governor Cuomo's 2015-16 Executive Budget Proposal**

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**Testimony by**

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I'd first like to thank you for inviting me to testify here today. I have spent nearly my entire adult life in education serving as a teacher in inner city Philadelphia and New York a principal in a lower socio-economic district as well as a Superintendent in NYC and here on the Island, and I can say without equivocation that The swirl around education, how to, and at what level, to fund education and how best to address reforming education as we know it has reached an all-time high; A high that has caused many to lose perspective; the perspective that the vast majority of public schools in New York are performing at very superior levels in areas of importance; areas beyond ill-conceived, poorly developed and manipulated standardized tests.

In my effort to keep perspective, I routinely visit schools talking to staff and students and visiting classrooms. However, during the first half of this school year, I visited every school in the District multiple times; visits with a purpose; visits designed to see best practices in action, and what I saw was amazing. What I saw leads me to say that Commack Schools have never been stronger; never provided a better education; and never had as many high-quality teachers and staff as we do right now -- all this despite the best efforts of the Governor, other policymakers, and the media to diminish public schools and public school teachers.

Over the last several years we have fought to stop an ill-conceived, State mandated APPR system, a mandate I opposed from the outset – teacher evaluation should be locally controlled. We have fought the developmentally inappropriate, year-in and year-out testing of young children in grades three to eight going so far as to offer vociferous testimony to Senate and Assembly committees; and we have fought the implementation of poorly-designed Common Core curriculum developed in such a way as to force schools to the middle; a middle designed by test makers and non-educators.

Unfortunately, these battles rage on and in many ways have intensified with the Governor's Education Reform initiatives. People should not be fooled by the rhetoric being put forth – many of these reforms are not good for public schools, even those that are "failing," and they certainly are not good for schools that routinely provide the best education in the world.

So the fight rages on with rallies and protests and advocacy efforts. In that regard, earlier this week, I was in Albany for "Lobby Day" where I, along with members of my Board of Education and PTA met with various elected officials. During these meetings we advocated vociferously on behalf our children, our teachers, and our schools.

It was encouraging to hear that many locally elected officials support our schools and teachers while simultaneously frustrating trying to make headway regarding the Governor's office; an office that is playing political games and holding state aid for schools hostage in an effort to forward politically motivated reform initiatives.

At this point, the anti-public school contingent have “created a fog” around the issues by continuously forwarding “solutions” to problems that do not exist in the vast majority of public schools. This “fog” leaves us fighting on numerous fronts including, but not limited to, over-testing young children, the Gap Elimination Adjustment, and an atrocious Annual Profession Performance Review (APPR) system; a system that I have opposed from the outset; a system that will become infinitely worse if ill-designed and ill-conceived State tests become the cornerstone necessary for being rated effective or highly effective.

Given the breadth of “reforms” being proposed by the Governor, I thought I would spell out our positions on several matters:

### **State Aid:**

- Uncouple the State budget from the Governor’s education reform initiatives;
- Eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment; that would mean approximately \$4 million in aid annually for Commack;
- Adjust the Foundation aid formula to address the disparities in funding to average-wealth districts, including Commack; and
- Release State Aid figures at the fully-projected increase of 4.8% - \$1.1 billion – or more.

**Teacher Evaluations (APPR)** – *I continue to oppose a State governed APPR system as teacher evaluation should remain a locally controlled matter. However, under current law, there is a system and I forward the following positions:*

I **do not** support the proposed changes to the Annual Professional Performance Review Process. Specifically, I **do not** support the following:

- Counting State test scores as 50% of the APPR score;
- The requirement that a teacher must receive an effective or highly-effective score on both tests and classroom observations in order to be rated effective or highly effective;
- Scoring bands for local assessments must be set in to State law.

### **Teacher Removal**

- Teacher Removal Proceedings: I **do not** support the streamlining of 3020a proceedings as outlined – two (2) ineffective APPR ratings trigger removal – due to the proposed over-reliance on State testing for APPR scores.

### **Common Core Standards, Curriculum and Testing**

- I **do not** support the continued over testing of students or the developmentally inappropriate, myopic portions of the Common Core Standards and N.Y. State modules.

Clearly I am opposed to the Governor's Executive budget, or the lack thereof, and his education reform initiatives, and I continue to argue that the budget and reform initiatives must be uncoupled – the finances of school districts must not be held hostage by those that wish to over test and diminish some of the finest schools in the country. Further, and perhaps most vociferously, I continue to oppose the over-testing of students – manipulated, myopic and developmentally inappropriate testing that does not support good instruction or student growth.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to address the committee and I hope we can fend off these ill-conceived “reform” initiatives.