

LOBBY DAY  
Commack UFSD  
March 7, 2017

ADVOCACY PLATFORM  
Superintendent Dr. Donald A. James

*Advocacy Platform*  
*Commack Now - 2017 and Beyond*

History: The Commack School District has a long-standing history of providing an outstanding educational program for all students; an education designed to support students in accomplishing whatever they want to accomplish upon graduating from our schools. To that end, Commack has endeavored to provide the best possible general education, special education, and advanced programming available to all students.

To demonstrate this, we provide some data points for consideration:

**For Your Information (FYI)**

*Commack's Graduation and College Attendance Rates for ALL Students*

- |                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Commack's Graduation Rate         | 99% |
| 2. Commack's College Attendance Rate | 98% |
| 3. Commack's College Retention Rate  | 90% |

*Commack's New York State Master Teachers (9 math and science teachers)*

- 552 Master Teachers in New York
- 9 Master Teachers in Commack (1.6% of all NY Master Teachers)
  - 600,000 Teachers in New York
  - 575 Teachers in Commack (0.096% of total in NY)

*State Aid Calculations*

Commack's Combined Wealth Ratio is 1.122 (the State Ave. is 1.0/LI Ave. 1.5)

- State Aid Average Per Pupil \$8,438+/- per pupil
- Commack's State Aid Average Per Pupil \$4,682 +/- per pupil (32.6 million/7,000+/- = \$4,657)

## Preamble

In our efforts to keep perspective, the Commack Board of Education and I routinely visit schools talking to staff and students and visiting classrooms. These visits are designed with a purpose; to see best practices in action, and what we see on our visits is amazing. What we see each and every time leads us 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 the implementation of a developmentally inappropriate, year-in and year-out Common Core testing model for young children in grades three to eight going so far as to offer strident testimony to Senate and Assembly committees; and we have fought the implementation of poorly-designed Common Core standards and curriculum developed in such a way as to force schools to the middle; a middle designed by test makers and non-educators; and we have fought an ill-conceived, mandated APPR system, a mandate we have vociferously opposed from the outset – teacher evaluation must be locally controlled.

At this point, the anti-public school contingents 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.

Given the breadth of “reforms” and some recent developments, below are the positions of the Commack school district:

**Common Core Testing** – We have long indicated our concern with the proliferation of mandated, high-stakes testing associated with Common Core standards and curriculum. Specifically, given the manner in which some states, New York included, utilize the mandates set forth in Federal legislation, the following adjustments are strongly recommended and should be considered:

1. For Younger Students (Grades 3 to 8): Modify grade-level State tests to include more developmentally-appropriate expectations and aligned materials and advocated with federal policy makers to reduce annual testing requirements; schools should not be required to test every year; and item analysis data from tests must be shared with schools to assist them in making educationally sound decisions about curriculum and instruction;
2. Special Education Students: Expand the qualification requirements to participate in “alternate assessments,” from 1% to 2% of students with disabilities. Further, test students at the appropriate grade level as opposed to chronological age; and exempt students based on IEP recommendations to forgo testing based on issues such as medically diagnosed anxiety, long term medical conditions and other criteria that preclude the need for summative testing.
3. English Language Learners: Extend the time from one- to two-years before testing English as a New Language (ENL) students to give them greater opportunity to acquire the English language.

Further, we support the revision of State testing protocols as outlined in the attached letter (Appendix A).

**Teacher Evaluations (APPR)** – *Repeal 3012d Teacher/Principal Annual Professional Performance Review*

We have long advocated that the teacher evaluation process should be left to local school districts only to be told that there is language in the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, now Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), requiring that New York mandate and govern a teacher evaluation process state-wide. Under the guise of NCLB, New York instituted 3012d APPR and mandated compliance through coercive actions including, but not limited to, threats of withholding state aid for failure to comply. However, at this time, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed HJR57\* and the US Senate is considering, and will likely pass, SJR 25\* each of which would “do away with regulations from the Obama administration regarding accountability under the Every Child Succeeds Act...” thus placing the authority for such with individual states. Therefore, with no Federal legal requirement binding New York to the 3012d APPR law, we are calling for the unconditional repeal of such returning the responsibility for teacher and principal evaluation to the local level.

\*See attached (Appendix B-1, B-2)

**Alternative Pathways to Graduation** – *Provide tangible, meaningful pathways to graduation for students with disabilities.* We have long advocated for alternative pathways to graduation for students with disabilities. While we acknowledge that the State has tinkered with the concept of alternatives, it is clear they have done so in a misguided fashion attempting to modify requirements that are flawed from the outset in an effort to “waive” students with disabilities through. We are advocating for real change; change that would support meaningful pathways to graduation; pathways that would prepare students for what they want to do when they graduate from high school.

- *See the attached for more detailed information (Appendix C)*

**Financial Matters**

Introduction: At this time, Commack’s Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) is just above the State average of 1.0. However, the District’s State aid allocation is well below the State average

**Tax Cap:** As you know, the projected Tax Levy Cap for 2017-2018 is approximately 1.26%. In Commack 1.26% raises \$1,500,000. This increase does not cover significant cost increases in a number of areas, areas beyond the District’s control:

- Special education costs have increased more than \$2,100,000 for 2016-2017;
- English as a New Language newly mandated costs have risen more than \$196,000; and
- Health insurance costs will increase in 2017-2018 by more than 11.6% which equates to approximately \$2,000,000 for Commack;
- Etcetera, Etcetera

**Foundation Aid:** Bottom Line: State Aid increases are the only source of revenue available to support these costs as well as other increasing costs such as health insurance, contractual, etc. Therefore, we strongly advocate:

- Fully fund the Foundation aid formula for 2017-2018;
- Adjust Foundation aid formula moving forward making “hold-harmless” allowances.
  - *See attached related PowerPoint presentation (Appendix D)*

**Mandate Relief:** Provide Sufficient Funding for All New Mandates

- Prior to implementation of any new mandate, a cost-benefit analysis of said mandate should be required by law. If that cost analysis determines the cost of implementation would exceed \$1,000,000 statewide, an automatic review by the State Legislature would be triggered. This review should include public hearings, input from local districts and mandatory legislative approval of amounts exceeding \$1,000,000 (see attached position paper).
  - See attached position paper (Appendix E)

**Targeted Funding:** Given the burden of existing mandates, we propose the following:

- Provide Targeted Funding for New Part 154 Mandate(s) (English as a New Language)
  - This new mandate costs Commack approximately \$600,000+ annually
- Provide Adequate Funding for State Testing and Scoring
  - This mandate costs Commack approximately \$200,000 annually
- Provide Adequate Funding for Curriculum Rewrite, Professional Development, and New Books and Materials associated with continued adjustments resulting in the flawed and failed Common Core implementation and subsequent necessary adjustments in NY
  - This mandate costs Commack approximately \$1,500,000 annually

**School “Choice;” Charter Schools; School Voucher Programs** - We vehemently oppose school choice/charter schools and/or school voucher programs. In that regard, specifically:

- We strongly oppose any school choice, charter or voucher program, particularly in school districts with a proven track-record of success – success that goes beyond test scores;
- We strongly oppose the reduction of funds to any public school in an effort to fund “choice” and/or charter schools and/or school voucher programs of any kind;”
- We strongly oppose any voucher program that would drain funding from public schools and make an already challenging financial picture even more challenging;
- We strongly oppose the concept that “choice” and/or charter schools do not have to meet the same requirements and are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as public schools;
- We strongly oppose the concept that “choice” and/or charter schools, etc. would not be required to maintain a demographically diverse student population that mirrors surrounding public schools.