



Huntington Union Free School District

"A Tradition of Excellence since 1657"

James W. Polansky

Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Editor:

As the dust attempts to settle following two weeks of state assessment administration, preceded by months of politically charged debate and activism, I'll, once again, express my plea that the state powers-that-be reflect on the situation and its root causes, and attempt to redirect their decision-making toward what is in the best interests of the children of New York.

I can attest to the fact that the administrators, teachers and staff members in Huntington clearly understand their responsibilities. They continue to develop and refine their crafts, but have never lost sight of the individual differences demonstrated by the students in their classrooms or buildings. They comprehend the concept of college and career readiness, and recognize their roles within a systemic approach to a child's education. They have instructionally prepared their students in alignment with the new standards, while continually striving to instill in students a love of learning. They have done everything possible to put aside their anxieties in the face of statewide educational unrest, rapidly moving evaluation targets and mandates that seemingly appear out of nowhere. I imagine all of this is characteristic of the majority of schools and districts throughout the state.

I'd like to think that some learning has been accomplished or perspective gained from recent events. For example, broad scale changes are likely to meet with failure if necessary preparations are not made or if measures are not put into place to facilitate those changes. (The cliché applies – one cannot build a plane while it is being flown.) No amount of federal monies is worth the potential outcomes of a rushed and, therefore, flawed change process.

I'll add that the importance of accountability and evaluation should not be minimized. But an unproven system based on unproven measures will surely contribute to inaccurate outcomes – both false positive and false negative.

Education Law §3012-d has been passed. It requires the Regents to redesign the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process by June 30 and subsequently requires districts to submit new plans by September 1. The bulk of plan development would be slated for a time when key stakeholders may not be available.

There are numerous education-related issues facing New York at this juncture. These issues must be approached with common sense and, again, with an eye toward what is best for our students. Why not begin such an approach with accepting the recent recommendation and allowing districts until at least September 2016 to build valid and sensible APPR plans? Give districts the time, resources and capacity to do this right. Provide them with the guidance and support they need. Leave threats of withholding aid out of the equation.

Education in New York is broken as a result of misguided and rushed initiatives that have left districts to their own devices to address state policy issues and misinformation spread throughout their communities. It is imperative that those in Albany reflect on what has happened and take the critical steps needed to restore transparency, close the wounds and repair what was and could return to being one of the finest educational systems in country.

Sincerely,

James W. Polansky
Superintendent of Schools