



Update

Vol. 38 No. 2

Oct. 2013

From The Desk of Rosanne Mamo

Newsday HEADLINES

October 13: NY EDUCATION CHIEF BACKS OUT OF LI FORUM

October 18: TEACHER EVALUATIONS TO BE POSTED ON WEB

October 22: SCHOOLS CHIEF CAN'T DUCK COMMON CORE GRIPES

October 23: NYS TEACHER RATINGS: 91% MAKE THE GRADE

October 26: NY EDUCATION CHIEF: WE MAY TEST TOO MUCH

It was only a matter of time before the glass house, in which Commissioner King was living, shattered. Those of us who have been around the proverbial block know that educational reforms come and educational reforms go. Educators just have to hold onto the pendulum and wait for the next sweeping change. The current movement, however, is multipronged: RTTT, APPR, CCLS, High-stakes Testing, coupled with the 2% Tax Cap. This reform is more onerous than those in the past and has not only divided our time, energy and attention, but it has resulted in the lowest morale across the state in decades. It is difficult to fight an octopus. You get one arm under control, while the other seven continue lashing out. But, brothers and sisters, do not lose faith. The pendulum has begun to swing back.

Commissioner King, local legislators and members of the media brushed NYSUT and its members aside during this turmoil and claimed that teachers were self-serving. Unfortunately, at the time, the public believed them and went along with that ludicrous notion. Why then, within a two week period of time, is there a sudden shift, almost a complete reversal in direction? Because, another "self-interest" group – the parents - finally had enough. Our students are important to us; and as much as we advocate for them, hidden in that advocacy is benefit for us. When parents stand up and make their voices heard, those in power begin to listen.

If you recall, less than two years ago, Senator Martins was barraged by letters from teacher unions. He was not considered a friend of education. Since that time, he has reached out to local union leaders, PTA associations and superintendents. He is trying to see things from our vantage point. On October 15th, a few days after King canceled his Town Hall meetings, Senator Martins posted on his website a long blog which is excerpted below.

"This was an incredibly poor decision on his part. Anyone involved in government must understand that just because you don't like the score, doesn't mean you can take your bat and your ball and go home. This is especially true as Dr. King not only chose the game, he set the rules by which our children will be gauged. It's wrong.

"At the moment New York needs a caring pragmatist willing to address real concerns raised by caring parents and educators who see a system being manipulated from above to the detriment of their children. Unfortunately, we have John King. He should immediately reschedule these forums or he should immediately resign."

Last week NYSUT, along with the Alliance for Quality Education, made plans to hold meetings for parents and teachers to fill the void after King abruptly canceled community forums in the wake of his disastrous meeting in Poughkeepsie on Oct. 10. Within 24 hours of that announcement, and bowing to public pressure including over 27,000 faxes that were generated and sent to legislators via the NYSUT MAC, King reversed course and reinstated public forums which will be moderated by state legislators. There will be four forums on Long Island. **Dates in Nassau on Nov. 13 and Dec. 9, and one date announced for Suffolk on Nov. 6. Locations will be announced shortly.**

Brothers and sisters, mark your calendars. Along with parents, we must fill the seats and fill the air with our concerns and questions. Affecting change to this latest reform is within our grasp. We are not alone in this fight! Never in the history of NYS public education has there been an opportunity like this for teachers, administrators and parents to stand side by side. Be a part of the change!

In Unity,

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MY MESSAGE

Anna Zurawinsky

I had planned on writing an article about our retirees until a teacher told me that she was sorry she chose the teaching profession. Regrettably, our poor economy has brought to the surface dangerous people who are using teachers as scapegoats to cover up their mistakes. These onerous and greedy peoples' primary objective is to privatize public education. Evidence of this objective: 1) profit-making testing corporations have gained influence at the State Education Department as well as with some of our elected officials, and 2) charter schools, which are controlled by corporations, profit off the backs of our taxpayers.

Never before have our teachers and their values been under such a fierce attack and faced with unprecedented threats from Albany and Washington. How do we fight big money groups and their "wannabe" followers opposing public education? That is a difficult task, indeed. First, do not ever regret being a teacher. It is a privilege denied to many, so respect yourself and your profession. Do not allow these so-called reformists, who are ignorant about the public education system to hurt our students and dishearten our good teachers. Refuse to be a scapegoat. Participate with your union to change the "anti" attitude and atmosphere. Last fall, our unions helped defeat several incumbent legislators hostile to our public education system. Our members have endured the effects of our economic recession, and this has led to the loss of jobs, onerous testing, an egregious tax cap and an evaluation system designed to deter college grads from the teaching profession. In unity, there is strength; and that is why I am a staunch advocate of unionism. There is power in numbers.

The SFT retirees remain active on behalf of our teachers by attending public forums on testing and evaluation, lobbying at home and in Albany, participating in legislative conferences and rallies in support of public school teachers. Our retirees are involved because we believe in public education. And we believe in you, our current teachers.

Einstein once stated that "Education is not the learning of facts but the training of minds to think." I believe in this notion, and I believe it is worth fighting for. We must endeavor to create such an educational environment for you and for your students.

Please, never regret becoming a teacher. Rather, embrace it.

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