

Connetquot Teachers Association, Inc.
1650 Sycamore Avenue, Suite #8
Bohemia, NY 11716

May 31, 2015

Ms. MaryEllen Elia
New York State Commissioner of Education
NYSED
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Ms. Elia:

As President of the Connetquot Teachers Association, I would like to welcome you back to New York and congratulate you on your appointment as New York State Commissioner of Education. On behalf of my six-hundred members, good luck!

I would be less than honest if I said that your appointment as Commissioner makes me happy. After reviewing your record, it does not give me much hope for dramatic change here in New York State. From the beginning, I have been an opponent of Common Core and questioned the so-called "reformers" pushing for it. As I did more and more research on Common Core, spoke to parents, teachers, psychologists, and kids, I became even a more vocal opponent of it. I will not bore you with all of the reasons why I think it is a "scam," but I will tell you that, to date, no one challenged by me has been able to give me any evidence that it works, nor any verifiable data that supports it. Let me be clear, regardless of how it was implemented, good, bad, or indifferent, it's not good for kids and harms our public school system.

The concerns that I and many of my colleagues and parents, both here and across the State, have are stated below. How you address these concerns during your first few months as Commissioner will be very telling. Let me also be very clear, if you think that "communicating better" with parents and teachers will make a difference and garner support for ill-advised educational policies and laws, you are mistaken. A pig is a pig is a pig, no matter how much lipstick you put on it.

Concerns:

1. Your use of millions of dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop a teacher evaluation system using student standardized-test scores as a key metric. Here in NYS, anything associated with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and education is unacceptable. If you follow the money trail, it all leads to privatization of our public schools.
2. Our understanding is that you also negotiated a merit pay system. Again, this creates competition between teachers and does nothing to enhance collaborative efforts among peers to improve the quality of education. Again, consistent with the entire Common Core, there is no verifiable data that shows that merit pay works, and in fact there are studies that show just the opposite. Merit pay is a great political sound bite, but does nothing to improve education.
3. You support school choice. No matter what you call it, school choice, charter schools, special schools, etc., you damage the public school system by taking money away from public schools so that these "choice" schools get proper funding.
4. Without hesitation you are a proponent of the Gates-funded Common Core State Standards. Other than hearing proponents talk about them being more rigorous and being better able to get kids to think "deeper," no one has been able to come up with anything more. I have been challenging my students

and getting them to think "deeper" for thirty-three years and I didn't need it to be called anything. It's simply good teaching.

5. It is our understanding that you supported a formula so that a certain percentage of teachers could be fired. Numbers like 5% have been talked about. It is my understanding that this never came to fruition, but was part of your agenda. This sounds very similar to the rhetoric and sound bites of our Governor. Keep in mind, his approval ratings are down to around 35/40%.

6. You are caught hook, line, and sinker by the corporate "reform" movement. How will you assure parents, teachers, and all educators that you are not?

7. You were an early proponent of high stakes testing and utilizing those tests to evaluate teachers. 200,000 opt-outs and climbing. Enough said!

I will finish by stating the following. You have a tremendous opportunity to play a major role in changing the direction of public education here in New York State and move it back in a direction to where teachers feel empowered to use their professional skills inside their classrooms and do the jobs they love to do with their kids. You have the chance to give back local control to school districts who know what is best for their communities and children. You also have the opportunity to garner the support of parents, teachers, and educators throughout the State unlike ever before, and to be the torch bearer, fighting for our students, teachers, parents, and communities. We have been beaten down by the so-called "reformers" with their deep pockets, media that has no idea what it's like to be in a classroom, and the politicians who have used public educators as punching bags for their own political ambitions. The masses are willing and able to stand with you and support you if changes are positive and those concerns raised above are addressed by you in a public and transparent way. If not, although we have been beaten and bloodied, there remains much fight in all of us; if we must fight to protect our kids, students, and professions, fight we will!

Sincerely,

Tony Felicio, Jr., President
Connetquot Teachers Association