



Douglas Ann Land, NYSSBA Representative

Testimony of the
New York State School Boards Association
to the
New NY Education Reform Commission
Presented by Douglas Ann Land,

August 14, 2012
Lemoyne College Grewen Hall Auditorium
1419 Salt Springs Road
Syracuse, NY

Good afternoon. As the NYSSBA representative for seventy six NYSSBA member districts in Central New York and the Southern Tier, it is my privilege to be asked to testify before the commission. The Districts I represent are primarily low wealth rural schools. I do have one city school, Syracuse and two small city schools, Ithaca and Binghamton. Almost all of these schools have pockets of high need, low wealth students.

Core Principal #1: Raise Expectations for All Students (The secret of happiness is low expectations!)

- The Illinois Lighthouse Study suggests that high expectations for students from Administrators, Teachers and Board Members do foster greater student achievement.
- It is also clear that all students do not start kindergarten on a level playing field. High quality Prekindergarten programs run by qualified PreK teachers show significant increases in achievement, particularly when linked with regular family engagement (particularly critical when working with immigrant families).
- Students transferring from one school to another may have vastly different levels of achievement because educational programs vary in quality and curriculum across the state and the nation. Support systems must be in place as students transition from one learning environment to another. Early identification and remediation are critical to prevent the transferring student from falling further behind grade level. Learning labs and intense on line education seem to be effective in quickly addressing these gaps.
- Just as critical is the need to challenge our most promising students. Accelerated programs at all grade levels are critical for our most successful students as boredom and disinterest can quickly lead to lack of interest in education. (Being included in accelerated programs also seems to improve the performance of underachieving students!)

- Providing a learning environment which is considered safe and free from bullying allows all students to perform at their best. An environment which is perceived as threatening is not conducive to educational achievement.

Core Principal #2: Stimulate the Student Learning Environment (Independent thinking is dangerous!)

- Today's students are digitally savvy and know that they can find just about any information they need on their digital devices. Our most important challenge is to use technology in a way which engages them, improves their research skills and gives them the skills to assess the validity of the information they obtain on digital devices.
- The role of the teacher in the classroom needs change from that of instructor to that of coach or facilitator. The most essential skills students need to become contributing 21st Century learners are creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and communication (with the possible addition of compassion and conscience). These skills are best learned in an environment where students are free to work and interact with one another, with the teacher prompting or offering help where necessary.
- We no longer live in a predominantly agrarian society where long summer vacations are necessary to help on the family farm or orchard. We need to extend both the school year and day to ensure that our students are engaged in learning for a greater portion of the day and year. This is becoming necessary to being competitively positioned with the educational systems of other nations.

Core Principal #3: Strengthen the Education Work Force (If we want respect, we must earn it!)

- Being a K-12 teacher in the United States does not have the same status it does in other nations. As a country, we appear not to value our educational system. Every school has one or two teachers who the community agrees are not performing effectively. Discipline has little effect on their performance and the long and costly process of removal is a process most schools can ill afford, so they remain. This does nothing to enhance the public opinion of education in our communities.
- APPR certainly offers some hope of relief to this problem but at considerable expense. However we have, in the past been able to dismiss probationary teachers with sufficient evidence that despite all attempts on the part of the district to support and improve their performance, they had not become competent teachers. The lengthy appeals process APPR suggests for refusing to grant tenure to a probationary teacher not granted tenure no longer allows us this discretion. This is not a step toward strengthening the education workforce.
- Schools of education must also revise their teacher preparation. Aspiring teachers need to spend considerably more time in the classroom that they are required to at present. The high number of young teachers dropping out of the profession within the first 2-3 years of their careers would indicate that they were not prepared for the realities of teaching. Educational programs must do a better job of connecting the philosophy of teaching with the practice. Unfortunately, with APPR, this may be difficult to effect as established classroom teachers may be unwilling to welcome inexperienced student teachers into their classrooms, as individual student performance may suffer and their test scores may suffer as a result.
- If we do indeed intend to promote increased public and parent participation in education, we must also include interacting with the public and parents in the educational curriculum. Parent Teacher

conferences are frequently quite challenging for new teachers who have had little or no preparation for this exercise.

Core Principal # 4: Cost Out an Adequate and Equitable Funding (Is adequate excellent?)

- The administrative costs of APPR should be included in any costing out of education from now on. It is estimated that depending on the number of teachers in a school, at least 500 administrative hours will be needed for conducting teacher evaluations.
- The course offerings which make up an adequate education should be specified. Should Physics be included, Calculus, more than one language, AP courses? An education is much more than simply cost per pupil. Is a student who is not offered the above options really receiving an adequate education? Is what was considered an adequate education seven years ago still an adequate education today? Is an adequate education really sufficient to prepare students for the 21st Century work force?

In conclusion:

Is it better to have made a mistake but not admit it, regret it and anguish over it, but stay safe and do nothing; or to admit all of one's mistakes and have the courage to take some risks in order to correct them? Do we want to celebrate creativity and diversity or maintain the status quo? What is our vision of our nation twenty years from now?