

LOCUST VALLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
22 HORSE HOLLOW ROAD • LOCUST VALLEY, NEW YORK 11560
(516) 277-5000 • FAX (516) 277-5098

ANNA F. HUNDERFUND, Ed.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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Testimony for:

The New York Education Reform Commission

Welcome to Long Island and thank you for this opportunity to share some insights with you and to ask for your help.

I am Anna Hunderfund, the Superintendent of Schools of the Locust Valley Central School District, a high achieving, wonderful, K-12 public school system which is located on the north shore of Nassau County. Prior to Locust Valley, I served as a teacher and administrator in suburban, rural and urban settings in two states and the District of Columbia. I have been a part of many educational change and reform efforts which range from court-ordered, school de-segregation to a wide spectrum of successful, researched based, school improvement initiatives. During the past 30 years, I have been involved with successful school de-tracking efforts and with raising standards and student achievement levels for all students. Because of that, I have been asked to serve as a consultant and a speaker for the National Governors' Conference, the New York State Education Department, professional organizations, universities, student advocacy groups and many school districts in our state and others. I have also completed extensive research regarding the effective evaluation of teachers. My doctorate is from Teachers College at Columbia University.

Now, on to Locust Valley, its many accomplishments and the many challenges which it faces. As you know, Long Island school districts are known for the exceptional achievement levels which our students, teachers and administrators consistently produce. Specifically, in Locust Valley, our faculty has implemented programs which have earned every school in our district “Reward School” status, the highest designation afforded by the New York State Education Department. Of all the public school districts with grades K through 12, our district is one of a handful in our state and the only one in Nassau County in which every school earned “Reward School” distinction. In order to qualify for that honor, each one of our schools had to meet high student achievement targets for all students and had to meet specific, annual yearly goals for by subgroups including, special education students, English language learners, low income students and students from specific racial and ethnic backgrounds.

This past Spring, Locust Valley High School was ranked 55th in the nation by *Newsweek* magazine. Because of the disproportionate number of students who successfully complete university level courses while students in our high school, as well as for our exceptionally high graduation rates and performance on other student achievement measures, *The Washington Post* and *U.S. News and World Report* also identified our high school as being among the very best in our country. In June, 82% of all students in our senior class including, our special education students, students for whom English was not their first language and students who received free and reduced lunches, completed at least one university level course while they were students in Locust Valley High School. More than 95% of all of our graduates went on to pursue college and university study.

What elements contributed to this success? Succinctly put, we encouraged enrollment by all of our high school students in rigorous, university level courses which were aligned with the

International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement program, St. John's University and the State University at Albany. In other words, we de-tracked our high school, established high expectations for all students and scaffolded them so that they could succeed and, they did.

In order to sustain and improve our student achievement levels in the future, we want to align our curriculum across all grades with the same international standards of excellence as those which we aligned courses in our high school. Moreover, we want to devote our instructional time and our diminishing resources to that purpose. Although these "next steps" may sound as though they are a logical progression, we are facing obstacles which hopefully you can help to eliminate and/or minimize.

We are currently shackled with numerous, unfunded, instructional mandates. Most of the costs related to these instructional mandates have grown exponentially during the past 2 years -- this, despite the national and local economic downturn, taxpayer overload and our proven successes. Currently, we are threatened with the imposition of yet another extremely expensive, mandate called, PARCC. Targeted for implementation in 2014, PARCC will dramatically increase computer-based testing for all students at a cost of approximately one million taxpayer dollars in Locust Valley alone for just the first year of implementation. That one million dollars will be more than one half of our maximum, allowable, annual, tax increase under the tax cap!

PARCC, combined with existing mandates such as, APPR, RTI and curriculum re-alignment with Common Core standards, will not only strain our fiscal resources, it will undermine the very instructional programs which will continue to be most essential to the success of our students and to the educational excellence for which they and we are known.

By law and regulation, any funding which we receive must subsidize state and federal mandates

first. Consequently, the programs which have prepared our students the best and distinguished them and us nationally, will quickly and necessarily become expendable.

Like many other districts on Long Island, we have demonstrated that our teachers and administrators know how to teach, lead and support student learning at the highest levels. We have utilized effective teacher and principal evaluation systems which have produced among the highest levels of student achievement levels in the State and the nation. We did so without ever considering the use of 97 separate teacher evaluation criteria which exist under APPR. Our exceptional student achievement levels substantiate that we also know how to provide remediation in extremely effective ways. Yet, we are being forced to implement Response To Intervention, another unfunded mandate which will further increase our costs needlessly and divert us from important instructional priorities.

If ever there were ever a time when the last thing that we need is more unfunded mandates, it is now! It has become extremely apparent to my Board of Education members, our faculty and our taxpayers that every dollar, which is required for mandates and is not subsidized with additional State funding, is a dollar which will come out of one of our taxpayer's pockets. With the tax cap and raising fixed costs, every dollar which must be spent for new and existing mandates, will not be available to support the very programs which are the most important to the future of our children, our state and our nation. Long Island residents have always supported our schools not realizing the toll that unfunded, instructional mandates have taken on their taxes. In Locust Valley, many residents are beginning to understand the negative impact which unfunded, instructional mandates continue to have on their taxes and our programs, and they neither like nor condone what they hear.

We are at a crossroads which will determine the future of public education on Long Island and in our State. Declining property values, reduced assessments and property tax refunds, are in some cases dramatically increasing taxpayer burdens -- despite the tax cap. Continuing to expand expensive, instructional mandates at this time and for the immediate future will make an untenable, unsustainable situation worse. Combined with the cap on tax revenues, increasing costs in this way will accelerate the fiscal insolvency of our districts; it will also bankrupt the educational excellence for which public schools on LI have been known.

We need your help to ensure that the quality of education on Long Island can survive and that 5 years from now it can be said that those like you, who are in positions to influence politicians and policy makers, were effective in stopping new unfunded, instructional mandates, and curtailing those instructional mandates which currently exist, especially for districts which have not only met but exceeded expectations.

The history of public education on Long Island and in Locust Valley is being written as we speak. I hope that it records that the New York Education Reform Committee helped to maintain the excellence of Long Island public schools rather than to ignore, and in so doing, guarantee our demise!

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Anna Hunderfund, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Locust Valley Central School District