

Good Morning Chairman Parsons, Assemblymember Nolan, Senator Flanagan, and distinguished members of the commission. My name is David Gamberg, and as a School Superintendent of a relatively small district on Eastern Long Island one may question how and why my views on issues under consideration by the commission have any bearing on the outcomes of your deliberations. I hope that my testimony will illuminate some insight that may help move the reform agenda forward from a ground level perspective regarding the impact of decisions already made, and those that will be forthcoming with the conclusion of your work.

The whole of your deliberations is inclusive of much evidence, the hard and soft data points, the loose and tight perspectives that coalesce around both broad and specific themes that accept and reject theories of change, of policy, and ultimately of a renewed agenda for education in New York State.

Albert Einstein once said, "if I had one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution."

With your permission, I ask that you consider a side of the debate that does not focus exclusively on promoting answers that may serve as potential solutions to the stated problems. Rather, I will primarily focus on, and promote, a series of questions for the commission to ponder. My wonderings center on issues related to school leadership as well as student and family engagement.

In many ways I support the premise that the world is a different place in terms of the landscape that appears before us in the classroom, the boardroom, and the communities that make up the fabric of our democracy. I share your passion. I share your conviction. I share the view that things must change, though not change in their entirety. Specifically, I am opposed to elements of the system for Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR). My opposition stems from a contention that this plan fundamentally pushes us in the wrong direction.

Somewhere between competition, merit systems, and accountability measures inclusive of standardized testing regimes and the status quo, lives a path towards vigorous student learning. There are places where professional learning communities are vibrant, and a way to scale up these pockets of success exists right now throughout New York State. Do not presume that every district in the state is equally broken. At the heart of our quest to find the clues that success leaves is not a concerted effort to ferret out the bad, rather it is to replicate the best and strengthen the core of effective teaching practice.

Rather than deconstructing individual results within and among each school building, I would argue for constructing a culture of success by feeding systems with greatness. Starting immediately, raise expectations of entry into New York State teaching colleges. The research base into effective teaching practice is clear and compelling. Push lawmakers to institute a universal standard of what it means to enter, learn in, and complete pre-service programs for those who aspire to teach in

New York. Eliminate the false notion that competition is the driver of success in this sector of society.

Preparing members of society to educate our children is a public covenant, a sacred trust that deserves our respect, reserved only for the best and brightest among us. It is not a training program that in some quarters lasts only a few weeks or months. Oversimplify the process such that this amount of preparation is sufficient, or worse rank practitioners as if they were widgets moving along an assembly line where defective pieces are culled out, removed, and replaced, and you will bear witness to a public covenant abridged. You will see community after community that sought a mechanized fix to score people from 1 to 100 leaving in its wake broken lives where the narrow focus of measured student achievement failed to produce deep learning, an appreciation for the arts, and a healthy disposition towards the goal of becoming life long learners.

I see the disruptive forces at work in society playing out day-to-day right in front of me as a school administrator. The average person, let alone leaders of industry, can see sector after sector where transformative change is the order of the day. It has been said that we must be prepared to “eat change for breakfast” to keep up with a global economy where old ways of doing things get displaced by the efforts of a new breed of entrepreneurs and innovators. New, emerging markets do not avoid the domain of teaching and learning. Sophisticated technologies, data collection systems, and theories of practice pervade every aspect of the educational universe.

As educators, our profession is often slow to adopt, and adapt to, change. Some within the communities that we serve are in greater need for changes in outcomes than others. Some are small, others large, some highly effective, others seek a rebirth if not a new direction. There is no “one size fits all” formula to institute change across the board in all school districts throughout the state. As such, communities are looking to leaders in government, industry, as much as they may seek changes within the classrooms of their children to render the changes needed to improve. The chemistry that produces results the world over do not come from any single ingredient that becomes the recipe for success. We know there is no silver bullet. The tapestry of greatness that is woven in any great endeavor is the culmination of many forces, converging synergistically in a way that tells the story of achievement.

Perhaps by comparison to members of this commission, mine is a humble lens on some of these issues. I have not yet published numerous research papers, held positions in national organizations, or been at the helm of high-powered systems such as Citibank, HLIN, PENCIL, The Harlem Children’s Zone, or any of the other accomplished agencies which the ranks of this esteemed commission come from in your lives beyond your service here. As an educator who has taught in the public schools in NYC, taught the Bloods and Crips as incarcerated youth in Los Angeles, served as an elementary building principal, worked in the district office administration of an 8,700 pupil school district with its share of children living in

poverty, and now as a school superintendent, I have seen and experienced a diverse set of organizational and professional opportunities to learn and hone my craft over the last 26 years. During those years I have worked with gifted and talented students who have gone on to attend Ivy League colleges and universities, as well as those children who became the victims of drive by shootings despite my best efforts to educate them out of a life of poverty and hopelessness.

My comments, and evidence presented today, focus primarily on the issues related to managing change—a look from within if you will. My questions stem from the many conversations and observations of my colleagues, and from a ringside seat of the raging debate between those who see the capacity of those within the system to marshal the forces needed to render a wholesale change in outcomes writ large, and those who contend that a larger, more dynamic set of factors are at play in the lives of our children in an uneven, if not imbalanced way—most notably issues of wealth and access to quality.

Are those who cry foul petulant ideologues, prone to acting out of self-interest to preserve the status quo? Are those who are behind the effort to demand that we look more carefully at the underside of the reform agenda, which touts the use of student test scores being shortsighted, and incapable of seeing the power of data driven decision making? Perhaps some are, but not all. Many of those who are weary of the use of blunt instruments that hitherto have not undergone a full scale beta testing to a point where their efficacy is proven, come to you and other policy makers as honest brokers.

We who embrace the qualities of change leadership, effective instructional design, and a vigorous experience for all children from kindergarten to commencement are not eager to shy away from the task at hand. Our day-to-day work with dedicated teachers, concerned families, and children—who look to us for the hopes and dreams of their future and not our past—is what shapes the compass of our professional lives.

There are, in fact, key components that will yield demonstrable change in the system. There is a compelling, if not overriding need to *preserve the past and find the future*. I can use the Socratic method and teach children skills that prepare for the 21st century as much under a tree as I could by using Skype. It has not, is not, and should not be an either/or proposition. How will we, as a State, strike that balance, take bold action, and identify the right levers of government to pull in order to make policy changes, welcome the professional paradigm shifts that must be made, and create a culture at the local level where all changes must occur? The question now is what are the unintended consequences of the present agenda?

Who owns the change? Is this in any way important to the outcome? I submit to you that ownership of the process of change is in fact paramount. Behavior does *precede* belief, and the conditions necessary for such transformative experiences of individuals, as well as organizations, happen intrinsically not extrinsically. My

strong recommendation to the commission is to avail yourself of the current climate that is harboring a great deal of mistrust and acrimony in school district after school district.

I ask each of you to pause and think of the *design* involved in both your personal success, and that of your affiliation to the organization that you have devoted your professional work to date. Chances are your determination, hard work, and perseverance played a significant role. Your personal and professional goals were focused like a laser beam on the essence of your work. Who was the architect of your dreams? Did your personal path to greatness flow out of an agenda rendered by outside forces, or did you intervene and make it your own?

I can testify to the fact that dozens of my colleagues have voiced concern and apprehension with the current plan on a scale that I have not witnessed in my 26 years in education. We are concerned with the present trajectory of our system to address teacher and principal quality as rendered in the form of APPR plans currently being adopted in school districts throughout the state. If one were to step back and consider how this is playing out, we can see evidence from all sides that point to any number of conclusions. Certainly there is entrenched resistance to change. From my perspective there is an equally true outcomes underway in many school communities, one that wrestles with the overly complex and disparate elements of design that fails to capture a more effective roadmap to move the agenda forward. If the "*less is more*" design principle can be understood and appreciated then this plan is *highly ineffective*.

Finally, I wish to offer as an example the type of engagement that is simple in its design, elegant, and has the power and potential to lift the quality of instruction by providing a way into the hearts and minds of school communities throughout the state. It is not meant to be an all inclusive, comprehensive exemplar of all issues pertaining to school leadership or student achievement and family engagement. I recall sharing the idea of this project with regent Roger Tilles of the NYS Board of Regents when he visited our school district last year. At the time I feared that such a project would be impossible given the weight of the APPR process.

Below is a link to a YouTube video that showcases the project.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb3-VdfXZoY&feature=youtu.be>

This short five minute PowerPoint is testimony to the fact that a school community can design an instructional concept that challenges its members to develop a learning process that promotes 21st century skills of creativity, communication, and collaboration. As you watch, please take note of those moments that represent a wide spectrum of learning opportunities involving students, teachers, families and community members—all focused on a common goal. Although this was a project that focused on creating a school garden, any authentic engagement determined locally by the leadership of the school, along with teacher and family support will

yield the kind of results that can become the harbinger of how a learning community builds capacity. *This is where leadership and engagement should live, driven collaboratively and vigorously by those at the ground level of school improvement and student learning.*

The point here is to honor educators, rather than castigate them in the public's eye, which creates conditions that promote fear and anxiety. My recommendation to you is for consideration of the deliberate and intentional effort to restore the primacy that trust plays into how any organization evolves into an effective one. With so many competing forces, and the rhetoric at a fever pitch, our ability to render effective change is challenged more now than ever before. The way forward is to reconsider the present course, for it has been said, "it is a bad plan that admits no modification."

Thank you for your time and your willingness to hear my views.