

**The Long Island Public Hearing for the
New NY Education Reform Commission Testimony**

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Good afternoon. My name is Marc Greene, I am a music educator in the Baldwin Union Free School District. I also am the President of NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association), a homeowner in the Middle Country Central School District, and the parent of a daughter that is a product of the public schools of New York State from grades K through 16. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commission for the chance to testify on behalf of the students, teachers, parents, and taxpayers of New York State.

I came to New York State as a college student thirty-six years ago, and quickly learned that the rigor of a New York public school education was in a class far above that of other states. My college peers had a far deeper knowledge base in all core subject areas as a result of their Regents diploma programs. They also had a broad appreciation and skill set in the Arts and Athletics. The quality of educational programs statewide was an important influencing factor in my choice to work, live and raise a family in New York State.

Over the past two decades, we have seen our state's educational system slowly surrender its soul to the interests of ill-conceived federal and state programs rooted in high stakes testing, school rating schemes and financial incentives. As we have become slaves to the sea of ever-changing acronyms – NCLB, RTTT, APPR, SLO, CCSS, to name a few – we have indentured our students and their education to the winds of political rhetoric in the quest for educational dollars. If we do not stop the insanity of reacting to political grandstanding in lieu of planning carefully for our students' futures, we run the risk of losing our primacy in educational leadership in the United States.

Examining the bleak state of education in California provides a glimpse of New York's potential future if we do not get off the politically reactive school roller coaster. In 1999 there were 1.1 million students enrolled in music courses, grades K through 12 in California. In 2011 that number was only 470,000, with a thousand fewer music teachers. California also has one of the highest dropout rates in the country. The two primary reasons are No Child Left Behind and its emphasis on high stakes testing in language arts and math which has narrowed the curriculum, and a huge shrinking of the education

budget in California that really goes back to Proposition 13 in 1978.

Left unchecked, unchallenged and misunderstood, the future of education in New York may very much look like present day California. Fast forward to 2022; a decade after the enactment of New York's historic 2% tax cap. School districts have spent all of their reserves in an effort to maintain the quality of balanced and broad educational opportunities that are the pride of New York. To avoid bankruptcy, schools begin eliminating all but non-essential programs. Reading every line of small print in every recorded book of educational rules and regulations, districts minimize instruction wherever possible, maintaining those programs that are measured under the current iteration of No Child Left Behind/Race To The Top/Career & College Readiness/Common Core Standards. If it brings in federal or state funds, it happens. Otherwise, it's gone.

In the educational wasteland of apocalyptic 2022, athletics, music, art, foreign language, business, home and careers are all littered on the shoulders of the school roadway. A few school districts have organized parent booster clubs to fund raise for these programs, communities where the golf outing and the grand dinner dance are cultural norms. For the rest of the students of New York, school has become a mundane chore of study and test taking, absent any spark of social-emotional connection and growth. Teacher morale, student morale, parent morale are all at a previously unimaginable low point.

Music education becomes the right of only the privileged few in 2022. Gone are the classroom music specialists. Common branch teachers in grades one through six play an occasional recording or display a song sheet as a nod to music learning standards. Most school buildings have basement chasms groaning with mold-infested cases containing band and orchestra instruments once used to begin instrumental study. The school chorus convenes during a student's eight and ninth grade years, fulfilling seat time mandates, and then disappears from the school culture.

The question arises: "How did this happen?" When those wonderful, acronym-laden programs were created, they were supposed to ensure quality education for all students, even distribution of funding, and college readiness. When the tax cap was enacted in 2012, it was supposed to prevent schools and local governments from spending recklessly and protect the addled taxpayer from skyrocketing property tax levies. We didn't mean to dismantle those programs that help bring students through the schoolhouse doors; that bring them joy; that motivate them to achieve in all areas of their studies. We didn't mean for our schools, long-known as leaders in student achievement, innovation, and creativity,

to wither into barren halls of mere statistical calculation. We didn't mean to take the heart and soul out of New York State – we were just trying to spend prudently and increase accountability. Now what do we do?

As a group appointed by our Governor to consider the future of education in New York State, I implore you: Don't create change just for the sake of change. New York has had a winning formula for education for years. Let's keep it updated and let's keep giving our students opportunities to grow, to explore, and to conclude their education in New York State able to lead meaningful and productive lives.