



ASSOCIATION
FOR A BETTER
LONG ISLAND, INC.

Statement by:

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Much has been written, proposed and analyzed regarding the condition of our educational system. Those with extensive resumes and doctorates in education have offered commentary and opinion on what needs to be done in the classroom to strengthen and enhance the educational process. There have been white papers and studies, essays and manifestos that seek reform, innovation and transformation.

Accordingly, it is not the intent of the Association for a Better Long Island (ABLI) to offer its own instruction manual on educational reforms. We are, however, one of the largest property tax payers in the region. Our members represent \$15 billion worth of commercial, industrial, retail and residential real estate. As a group who picks up a sizeable part of the tab for public education, we have a right, and an obligation, to say something about the quality, burden and potential of our public schools.

Over the years many have proposed the selective consolidation of Long Island school districts. Looking at this Balkanized management of various districts there is not a successful business person who would tell you that enormous cost savings could be realized for the taxpayer if there was a centralized approach to salaries, benefits, purchasing, staffing and the like.

But we are realists in this room. The ABLI recognizes that people will be building cities on Mars before there is school district consolidation on Long Island. But that doesn't mean that consolidation should be taken off the table. We suggest that we more clearly define the concept of "consolidation" and ask whether there are options and opportunities.

For example, how many school district purchasing agents does it take to order bathroom tissue? How many different kinds of agreement must there be for a school bus contract? How many IT consultants must be retained by Long Island school districts trying to figure out how to integrate their classrooms into the Digital Century? The ABLI would argue that hundreds of millions of dollars in tax savings could be realized without ever touching the sanctity of separate and independent school districts if backroom operations were centralized.

Classroom populations would remain untouched. Teacher contracts would remain the purview of individual districts. Curriculum decisions would remain sacrosanct. The salaries of superintendents would be subject to individual boards of education. And yet the taxpayer would reap enormous benefits by eliminating just one single layer of duplication. It would solve the seething anger currently directed at educational salaries. It would create a surplus that would allow districts to rebuild

extracurricular programs that have suffered. And it would demonstrate that the educational industry on Long Island is listening. Such a move would allow it to be part of the solution.

In a region that is under competitive assault from so many sectors – energy costs, infrastructure issues, confiscatory taxes and the overall cost of living there are many reasons why corporations find other regions of the country to put down their roots. What keeps many firms here is a simple equation, the quality of its employees. The Long Island employment pool is better educated, highly motivated and demonstrates an extraordinary work ethic. But the Achilles heel is obvious and dangerous. If our educational system becomes so costly that it collapses under its own financial weight then we will have truly lost our future.

The ABLI would argue that these school systems are run by CEOs as much as educators. Collectively they are responsible for the expenditure of billions of public dollars. They cannot view themselves as isolated entities subject to the occasional school budget vote. They need to institute collective reform in a manner that protects the taxpayer and their independence or the day will come when they have no options but to confront a fierce and draconian response from those who can't afford to move away.

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