



Did You Hear What the Governor Said?

By Dr. Scott Martzloff, Superintendent
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We have officially entered the time of year for Albany budget deliberations, and with it, the drama of the political season. Sadly, the January 21 kickoff with the Governor's 'State-of-the-State' and budget proposal was notable for its continued attack on public schools and teachers.

Governor Cuomo continues to lump together all of the school districts in this great state as if every student is failing and every teacher is incompetent. He continues to make the point that graduation rates are unacceptable. But nowhere in his tenure as Governor has he acknowledged the great number of districts, like Williamsville CSD, achieving at a high level. Nowhere has the Governor ever acknowledged that his incessantly repeated talking points are skewed by the poverty-ridden systems of New York, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, etc.

Beyond his rhetoric, the Governor made a specific set of proposals regarding education reform, some of which are deeply disturbing and should give anyone – not just parents – great pause.

He called for changes in teacher/principal evaluations (known as the Annual Professional Performance Review or *APPR*) that would base the evaluations on 50% of the performance of students on state assessments, and 50% from independent classroom observations. **I do not believe this is a proposal that is in the best interest of our students, families and educators.** Evaluating teachers largely on the basis of a single exam is a poor practice and many states are moving away from this approach. Documented statistical flaws of this model will not allow leaders to fairly distinguish performance among teachers in all districts. Even worse, students will continue to be overloaded with assessments. Teachers who are underperforming but show promise can't be assessed through this tool, and in general, this model does not support teacher development.

The fact is that the issue of standardized testing continues to resonate, and the Governor inexplicably has *upped* the stakes of high-pressure assessments. Professionally, I believe this is the wrong direction for our public schools. **As a school community, we will treat the concerns of students and families on this matter with sympathy, dignity and care. We respect the reactions of our Williamsville families to this issue (one that is, sadly, not in our control) and will endeavor to ease any ongoing consternation about testing.**

The Governor has also called for an increase in state aid to schools – but only if he gets his way on his 'education reforms.' We are all hopeful that the rank and file legislators reject this cynical budget ploy and that funding will be evaluated on its merits, not because of a carrot and stick political game.

Our school district has endured years of funding cuts of over \$12 million including a yearly shortfall of almost \$6 million due to the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) not being restored. All the while, we do more with less and continue to provide an outstanding educational experience for every child that we serve. It is time for the Governor to recognize this and provide adequate funding to our school district and restore the GEA while abandoning these ill-conceived reforms.