



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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**Remarks of Commissioner John B. King, Jr.  
Association for a Better New York  
Wednesday, May 28, 2014**

Good morning and thank you all for being here. I want to especially thank

remedial courses are far more likely to leave college discouraged and saddled with debt but without a degree.

And, as I travel across the State, I hear from employer after employer that they cannot find the skilled employees they need or even unskilled employees ready to succeed in post-secondary training.

To put it plainly, this crisis in preparation for college and career is largely a result of a troubling mismatch between past P-12 expectations and what is actually needed today for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We can and must do better. In order for New York State to secure our long-term economic future, we must ensure that all of our students regardless of race, zip code, or economic status receive the excellent, effective education they need to be prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life.

Your leadership is essential to achieving this goal.

As we come to the end of this school year and look ahead to the next, we must come together across sectors business, unions, non-profits, civil rights organizations, higher education, and P-12 education to support higher standards for teaching and learning. We must support what works for kids.

The Common Core State Standards common sense standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics developed through the collaboration of P-12 educators, higher education faculty, business leaders, and content experts, and adopted by 45 states identify the knowledge and skills necessary at every grade level for students to be on the trajectory toward college and career success.

sion in New York over the last year around accountability, teacher effectiveness, and the implementation of the Common Core standards, adopted by the Board of Regents in 2010.

Unfortunately, in that conversation, too much of the discourse has been driven by false narratives and too little attention has been paid to what the Common Core means in classrooms.

Each week, I visit classrooms in every corner of the State. In classroom after

better lesson plans and new approaches to teaching that are raising the bar and improving outcomes for children.

And I just want to stop for a moment and thank them. They are heroes doing things every day that help the children they teach overcome their learning challenges and social and emotional issues both inside and outside the classroom.

I am here today because I was blessed to have teachers like that. My mother passed away when I was eight; my father when I was twelve. Teachers could have -American and Latino male student going to school in Canarsie, Brooklyn with a difficult home situation what classroom experiences that were at once challenging and nurturing, rigorous and engaging.

I became an educator to try to create for students the kind of learning experiences that saved my life. Across our State, there are thousands of educators who are just like the amazing teachers I had devoted to their students and devoted to their craft. They are making a difference every day even as the policy battles are raging around them.

the same issues. But despite the attempts by some to gain political advantage by attacking higher standards, there are over 40 states that are moving forward to improve instruction and almost all of them have begun in some way to administer Common Core assessments.

As the school year comes to a close and th

Yes, we need to continue to provide high-quality professional development and build on the \$500 million in Race to the Top funds we have invested in New York in the Common Core and the new evaluation system.

And yes, implementation across our 700 districts has been uneven and we must help districts that are struggling learn from those that are excelling.

But just as we teach our students to respond to adversity with perseverance and renewed effort, we must continue to thoughtfully adjust and move forward toward higher standards.

There can be a political debate about evaluation and accountability but the teachers and schools get better.

What we know about student learning growth has to inform our evaluation of educator performance, alongside administrator observations.

Our teacher evaluation system must and will continue to provide feedback to teachers to help them improve their teaching and student learning. For the vast majority of teachers, it is simply about getting better. For a very tiny percentage, it helps determine whether they are really suited for this work.

In New York State last year, we only identified one percent of teachers as ineffective. These teachers have another school year to get better with support. So anyone who says the new evaluation system is all about firing teachers is simply wrong.

There can be a political debate about testing, but we have to know if children are learning and we have to make sure that children at risk are not slipping through the cracks.

The Common Core does not mean more testing. In fact, not a single additional test is required by the Common Core. The same number of state tests is required in New York now as before the Common Core. The Common Core actually means these tests are better not perfect tests, because of course no test is a perfect measure but better. Common Core-aligned state tests incorporate more writing in English Language Arts, more real world problem solving in Math, and more critical thinking.

At the same time, we have to limit testing to the minimum needed for good decision-making. In some places, testing has gone too far. Under state law, districts can choose to add local tests for a variety of purposes. school districts have the power and the authority to reduce unnecessary testing and they should.

There can be also be a political debate about curriculum, but again student learning is the only thing that matters and educators at the local level are the best people to make that judgment. In New York State, we created an optional curriculum for English Language Arts and Mathematics. It has been recognized nationally for its quality and downloaded nearly seven million times but the decision on whether to adopt it, to adapt it, or even to ignore it remains at the local level, where curriculum and professional development decisions have always been made.

At the same time, we must all hold publishers accountable for producing high-  
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low-quality curriculum materials being marketed by some publishing companies are more of a threat to the success of the Common Core in classrooms than the political rhetoric at the extremes.

As we focus on what matters most student learning we must come together to push back on the falsehoods around Common Core standards that threaten to undermine the progress of our teachers and students.

When your elected officials acquiesce to people who claim that the standards are a national conspiracy of the left or the right speak up and push back.

When opponents of higher standards make false claims about privatization and corporate reform, speak up and explain that the business community has a stake in better educational outcomes for our students, just like everyone else.

When defenders of the status quo say poverty, or difficult family circumstances, or speaking a language other than English at home are insurmountable obstacles to  
nt to the countless  
schools, teachers, and students proving them wrong every single day.



