



NEW MILFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Office of the Assistant Superintendent
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Joshua Smith
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

March 10, 2014

Good morning my fellow civil servants:

My name is Joshua Smith and I currently serve as the Assistant Superintendent of the New Milford Public Schools.

I am here today, not to promote the merits of the Common Core Standards, nor express challenges and concerns. I am here to ask you to move forward as responsible legislators and to act based on what is best for the communities you serve and not to react to current hype and sensationalism.

As you have already been reminded today, the Common Core Standards were adopted by this body in 2010. SB-438 passed by a margin of 106 to 38 in the house and 31 to 4 in the senate, creating Public Act 10-111 and the educational reform changes necessary for the state to qualify for the Race to the Top Grant.

These changes were an outgrowth of the PK-12 Commission, created by a Republican Governor, supported by many non-partisan groups and its members represented constituents from many major industries and businesses across the state.

Connecticut applied for the Race to the Top Grant, not once, but twice and this state put pressure to replace the previous education commissioner when he was seen as not moving fast enough or his reforms were too slow. It was clear to everyone at the time what this bill did. It was clear to the members of this body that voting for SB-438 aligned state and national initiatives, created evaluation reform, and committed this state to a national assessment. These legislation initiatives were applauded by conservative and liberal governors in many states and seen as the only way for slow moving, locally controlled and fragmented school districts to enact reforms. SB-438 was presented as a bi-partisan success that would prepare our students for global competitiveness and combat the poor performance of the United States in international rankings.

PA 10-111 was passed with little or no funding to support local school districts in our state. It was passed with no process in place to educate parents, teachers or students. It was passed with little concern for how the changes would impact local school districts or a time line that allowed for gradual change.

Now, four years later, six months after the state has begun to support districts in the change, now you look to review the decision? Have you asked your local constituents what would happen? How it would impact your schools? How it would be incorporated into budgets that are days away from being sent to referendum?

What does a moratorium even mean? Our curriculum is locally created and owned. It has been approved by local boards of education. Do you expect each local board to suddenly strike all curriculum that aligns to Common Core Standards? Do you have an alternative as to what standards we would align to instead or an understanding of the time it would take to make such a transformation?

I believe that when our state adopted the Common Core Standards it did so with the best intentions of our students. After four years of close work with them, I know that they are forcing positive changes to our educational system, yet there are components of the standards that need to be improved and examined. I believe that four years ago, this body had the same good intentions; however this work cannot be done with the misguided stroke of a pen.

If you make the argument that this legislation was written in haste in 2010, if you hear that the State did not fully understand the ramifications, if you feel that the bi-partisan super majority votes were uninformed, then I ask you to not repeat the same mistakes they made.

We have strong school districts in this state; we have talented educators and an informed electorate. They are all working to do what is best for children. Erratic and irresponsible legislating forces school districts to respond and reallocate scarce resources to implement ill-conceived mandates.

If you truly represent the tax-payers of this state, if you are concerned about limiting the role of the government, if you want efficiencies in municipal funding, then I (we) ask you not to try to solve or fix the mandate you gave to districts four years ago. We are fixing it locally. We are defining the implementation for our towns and our students. We are helping students and educators to succeed and excel. We are addressing the challenges that have been presented to us, and for the first time in four years, we are working together. For the first time, we are looking at what is working and what can be improved upon. Random, incomplete legislative acts will not improve the process, but send our state, once again into confusion and inequitable implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joshua Smith".

Joshua Smith
Assistant Superintendent of Schools