



KENNETH P. ZEBROWSKI
Assemblyman 96th District
Rockland County

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July 7, 2015

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Commissioner Elia:

I would first like to congratulate you on your historic appointment as the first woman to hold the office of Commissioner of the New York State Education Department. I look forward to working with you on the many issues facing education in our State.

I am writing you regarding the East Ramapo Central School District, a district that has faced both criticism and controversy over the past several years. As you know, this district has been the subject of critical audits, reviews and reports by the State Education Department (SED) and other agencies including a report by State appointed fiscal monitor, Hank Greenburg, in the Fall of 2014. As representatives of the school district, my colleague, Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee and I, introduced oversight legislation that mirrored recommendations in the Greenberg report including the appointment of an oversight monitor in the district for five years (A.5355-A). We were able to get this bill passed in the Assembly but unfortunately it was not brought up for a vote in the Senate.

I am reaching out to you to determine what the appropriate next steps are in order to secure the academic future of the East Ramapo students. We need to act quickly to provide stop gap measures that will both restore trust in the School Board and provide reasonable oversight in the district. I will continue to work towards passage of the legislation but in the interim, we must work together to provide an alternative response to improve academic opportunities in the district.

I recommend that the Department use its current statutory powers to install a monitor in the district on an interim basis. Although the monitor may not have all the powers delineated in our legislation, I believe someone in the district on a day-to-day basis is better than the status quo. The Department should use the same legal authority it used to appoint Hank Greenberg but to expand the new monitor to be a presence within the district for a sufficient period of time. This monitor would be able to listen to the concerns of all parents, teachers and students in the district, provide an in-depth analysis of the district's policies and report to SED, the Governor and Legislature for necessary action. The monitor should also provide the Board with assistance that will be helpful in improving community relations. The school board president, Yehuda Weissmandl, has recently indicated "that an additional layer of oversight could help to rebuild confidence in the district's leadership." I believe we should take the Board President at his word

and develop an oversight mechanism that the Board can utilize to improve the district's operations.

The monitor can be funded through an appropriation delineated for the monitor established in our legislation. The monitor would have similar responsibilities that have been discussed over the past several months, including but not limited to, attendance at board meetings, access to district documents, attendance in executive session, power to hold public meetings or hearings and the ability to provide comment and feedback on board decisions. The monitor would also be able to publicly object to unfavorable board decisions. This would provide the community with an independent set of eyes in the district and State officials with detailed information on how to improve the district.

We are committed to bringing this district back from the brink of disaster and improve its educational opportunities so that all students have a fair chance. This past session was a moment of learning for all stakeholders involved in the process. We learned that despite numerous concerning reports and statistics, the Senate leadership is currently not willing to pass an effective monitor bill, we learned that educational inequality still exists in the district, and we learned that our work is not finished; which is why I am asking for your help in taking action now.

Over the next month, when your schedule permits, I would like to personally meet with you to discuss this proposal and how to move forward with the East Ramapo Central School District. Please have your staff contact my office at any time to set up this meeting.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth P. Zebrowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "K".

Kenneth P. Zebrowski
Member of Assembly