March 3, 2014

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Almost twelve months have passed, and once again public school districts are preparing for a repeat of last year’s publicly recognized faulty and instructionally wasteful New York State Education Department (SED) directed mathematics and ELA assessments of students in grades three through eight. In less than 30 school days, students will again be tested in content through assessments that have yet to be vetted against instructed curriculum, have limited practical value in terms of improving instruction, and make little – if any, meaningful contributions in developing teacher and principal evaluation scores.

Wherever one looks, there are cries and calls for a slowdown of the implementation of assessments, as well as a slowdown – or rejection of, Common Core standards. The voices of concern are not based on a fear of heightened expectations for student or teacher performance, but rather on a widespread recognition – clear and well informed, that in order for any positive change to take place, the current implementation plan must be redesigned, which would require a moratorium on this spring’s testing. This will avoid students, once again, being tested on materials not yet taught.

There has been acknowledgement, albeit reluctant, from the Commissioner himself and from the Regents’ Chancellor, that the rollout of standards and assessments has been faulty – though their acceptance of any responsibility to authentically improve the process is clearly missing. The assessment component of Common Core Standards, at the very minimum, must be redesigned and quickly to avoid further erosion of public confidence in the New York State Education Department.

The results of last year’s exams are not valid because the assessments themselves were not properly vetted to ensure that they accurately reflected student learning, and because schools were not provided sufficient lead-time or resources to adequately digest the new Common Core Learning Standards. Contrary to what SED claims, the
upcoming exams will still not provide a real picture of student learning or of a teacher or principal’s effectiveness. Delay in the distribution of the SED instructional modules, for example, resulted in reduced time for the requisite teacher training and, most importantly, student learning. Students, therefore, will again be tested on curriculum shifts and strategies they have yet to be taught. And, due to SED’s insistence on continuing the problem laden implementation process, we are about to repeat the experience.

It is important to reiterate that as educational leaders, we are all in support of a more rigorous curriculum that properly prepares our students to be college/career ready and successful contributors in a competitive global society. Curriculum shifts and rigorous learning promoted in the Common Core movement are worthy of support, but not at any cost. The exams and cut scores are invalid instruments designed only to promote a political agenda and serve no instructional value as currently structured. Students should not, again, be subjected to this self-destructive process.

Esteemed educators across this state have repeatedly provided to the Commissioner and the Board of Regents suggestions to modify implementation of educational reforms without reversing the course of continuous improvement in standards, curriculum and teaching for learning, rather than teaching for testing or teaching for compliance. Their response has been minimal at best. The Commissioner and the Board of Regents have repeatedly ignored input, as evidenced by the lack of any deep, meaningful reflection that has resulted in any real adjustment of the reform implementation model. As educational leaders this is frustrating and unacceptable to us and to our communities, who have placed the future of their children in our hands.

While educators continue the fight to provide students with appropriately developed and assessed curriculum, we welcome the actions proposed by elected officials because their voices carry the messages that have been repeated over and over again by all stakeholders – including parents, in the public education system.

Time is quickly running out: April – and testing – will soon be here. There is still time to do what is right for our students and for the success of this initiative. Our legislators understand the urgency to act – to not repeat what failed last year and will surely fail again, and deserve our support for their courageous stance. Taking a moratorium – slowing down and improving implementation of educational reforms, will ensure that the intent of raising standards and accountability will be realized effectively, productively, efficiently and – though it might seem hard to believe, much more quickly than the process designed by Commissioner King and the Board of Regents.

Our children cannot speak for themselves, so we must continue to speak for them until our voices are heard.

Sincerely,

Roberta A. Gerold, Ed.D.  
President, SCSSA

Michael Mensch, Ed.D.  
Chair, Common Core/Common Sense
Enc.
cc:

Sen. Philip Boyle
Sen. John Flanagan
Sen. Charles Fuschillo
Sen. Kemp Hannon
Sen. Kenneth LaValle
Sen. Carl Marcellino
Sen. Jack Martins
Sen. Dean Skelos
Sen. Lee Zeldin
Assembly. Steven Englebright
Assembly. Michael Fitzpatrick
Assembly. Andrew Garbarino
Assembly. Al Graf
Assembly. Edward Hennessey
Assembly. Charles Lavine
Assembly. Chad Lupinacci
Assembly. Tom Mckevitt
Assembly. Michael Montesano
Assembly. Anthony Palumbo
Assembly. Andrew Raia
Assembly. Phil Ramos
Assembly. Joseph Saladino
Assembly. Robert Sweeney
Assembly. Fred Thiele
Chancellor Merryl Tisch
Commissioner John King