

# Reasons for hope as schools reopen

New state leadership on public education and a new testing contractor are just two

BY GARY D. BIXHORN  
AND SUSAN A. SCHNEBEL

The start of another school year brings with it renewed optimism and an opportunity for a fresh start. Despite recent controversy over public education in New York State and the few chronically low-performing schools facing state “receivership” in our area, many Long Island students continue to achieve at exceptional levels and our schools remain a source of regional pride.

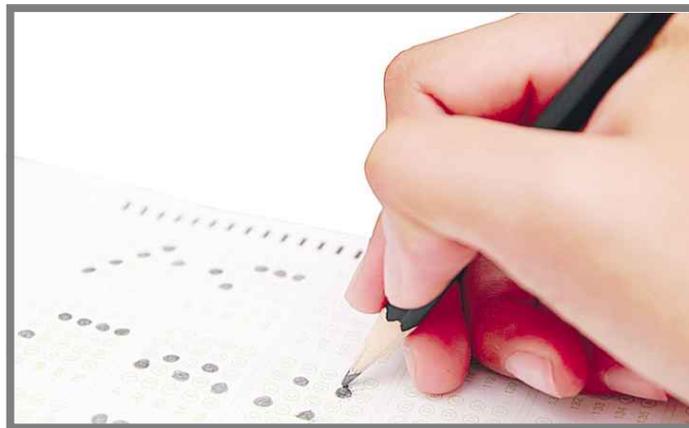
Recent community demands for more involvement in school reform reaffirm the importance of maintaining local control. This is significant; research and practice show that plans designed and implemented locally are the most effective paths to school improvement.

For example, the Hampton Bays schools recently partnered with Suffolk County Community College to address the national issue of college readiness. As a result, the senior year math curriculum was adjusted and the percentage of their graduates requiring remediation in college math dropped from the national average to well below half that average.

Diminished local control prompted by growing state and federal involvement is a troubling trend rooted in the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act that was the cornerstone of President George W. Bush’s education agenda. That intrusion into local matters opened the door to the even more aggressive Race to the Top initiative of the Obama administration.

In the state’s zeal to qualify for the “carrot and stick” funding attached to this initiative, schools were strong-armed into agreeing to rigid one-size-fits-all reforms.

It was that agenda that triggered the state’s rocky rollout of the Common Core standards, an intensified emphasis on standardized testing, and a push to tie student assessment results to teacher evaluations. Those measures generated so much public concern that



ISTOCK

200,000 students opted out of the spring 2015 state assessments — an act growing out of unprecedented frustration with the state.

The fallout from the poor rollout continues to do damage, as districts are forced to renegotiate teacher evaluation protocols due to rushed implementation. So, why be optimistic as we begin the new school year?

Here are four reasons for hope.

■ The State Education Department has a new leader, Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, who hopefully will be cognizant of the past and avoid some of the

difficulties encountered by her predecessors.

■ The development of state assessments is under a new contractor, and it appears that the state will use a more collaborative approach, involving teachers and principals in test development.

■ Efforts to reauthorize federal education law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, are underway. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) has sought input from the Suffolk superintendents on the new Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. This is a more promising start to legislative action than we’ve seen in some time. Hopefully,

the new law will lead to more flexibility and enable the state to implement overdue mandate relief, including overhauling evaluation requirements for English language learners.

■ We see extraordinary teaching and learning in classrooms every day despite so many external distractions.

The relationship between schools and government has to change if we are to improve education. Implementing meaningful student assessments and teacher evaluations, assuring college and career readiness and the future of the Common Core can only be resolved through cooperation.

Lawmakers must assure that schools are empowered to meet community and parent expectations while remaining accountable to the state and federal governments.



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STEVE POST

Site in Huntington where state workers began clearing trees for a Long Island Expressway rest stop, before town officials objected.

through the city.

All major infrastructure projects face opposition, take time and must show a cost justification. But Long Island has to come to grips with the fact that it is an island, and moving overland through New York City is slow and costly. Let’s develop a deepwater port.

James T. Rooney  
Centerport

## Rest stop politics seem Cuomo’s style

New York residents who watched Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo ram charter schools down Mayor Bill de Blasio’s throat are familiar with Cuomo’s style of governance.

Now Long Islanders are getting the Cuomo treatment. He ignored Huntington officials’ envi-

ronmental concerns and had the state Department of Transportation start work on a large rest area between exits 51 and 52 on the Long Island Expressway [“The wrong route to a rest stop,” Editorial, Aug. 27].

In other words, it’s my way or the highway.

Robert Berger  
Bellerose

## Female Marine was wrongly relieved

As a proud retired Marine who went through basic training at the Women’s Recruit Training Battalion on Parris Island, South Carolina, I am disheartened by the firing of Lt. Col. Kate Germano [“Did Marine officer push too hard?” Opinion, July 24]. Based on the reports of her dismissal, there is something seriously wrong when military leaders give more importance to political correctness than to armed forces preparedness.

Basic training is tough. Ap-

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parently, so is Germano. I find no problem with that, since a major goal of that course is to toughen up recruits both physically and mentally. It’s not a forum for sensitivity training.

If recruits cannot withstand the pressures of boot camp, how will they endure those of war-time?

According to what I’ve read, Germano’s behavior was not inappropriate. Her objective was gender equality in an institution known to be the most gen-

der-biased among all the military branches. Yet, instead of being supported, she was removed from her position. She was considered too tough, too Marine for a female.

Her firing only served to provide another example of the very inequality she was trying to change. It also points out the softening of our military. And in light of current world dynamics, that is very dangerous!

Marie G. Nuzzi  
Albertson