

PRESS : FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**KING'S "SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP" SPEAKS OUT
ON RESCHEDULED NYSED FORUMS**

On October 10, 2013, at a Town Hall event sponsored by the NYSPTA the undersigned parents spoke at the microphone before Commissioner John King, Jr. in an effort to advocate for our own children and/or the teachers, administrators and students in our communities. The individual concerns that we raised with Commissioner King were drawn from our own personal experiences and were based on our individual roles in the community in which we live.

Many of us made sacrifices to attend this event: researching issues, driving long distances, and arriving well in advance of the event start time eager to engage in discussion and make our voices heard by the Commissioner of Education, John King, Jr. himself.

In light of certain statements made in the press by Commissioner King and controversy that has ensued in the aftermath of that event, we would like take this opportunity to comment and clarify a few things publicly. We thank you in advance.

The purpose of the meeting, as advertised in the NYSPTA flyer, was to provide stakeholders an opportunity to share concerns directly with Commissioner King and/or NYSED representatives regarding "Common Core, testing and issues with security and privacy of student information." We saw this as a valuable opportunity since Commissioner King along with NYSED and the Board of Regents collaboratively set policy on these important subjects. We were eager to participate in this event because, in our opinion, the chance to speak directly to Commissioner King and NYSED about important decisions and policies has been extremely rare if not utterly obsolete. This forum was long overdue.

Each one of us was provided no more than 2 minutes at the microphone to face Commissioner King and to state an opinion about how his educational policies impact our lives. We spoke from the heart.

Commissioner King has gone on record stating that the reason he cancelled NYSPTA forums after the October 10, 2013 Town Hall event is because "special interest groups attempted to manipulate and control the microphone". Commissioner King specifically referred to the 7 of us who spoke at the microphone when he made that sweeping allegation. There were many who were denied the chance to speak at all. King further alleged that "special interest groups" "attempted to co-opt, manipulate" and hijack the forum. This is simply not true. Although this event has brought us together for the purpose of issuing this statement, we are not a "special interest group" then and we are not a "special interest group" now. There was no collusion. There was no pre-planning to undermine the forum. There was no conspiracy. We simply exercised our right to express an opinion about Governor Cuomo's education plan for New York as well as our right to comment on the Board of Regents and Commissioner King's decisions

and poorly implemented education policies. Truth be told, we simply stated our personal and individual opinions on these matters.

We are aware that NYSED has rescheduled forums that were cancelled by Commissioner King. We are pleased to hear this news. The events and aftermath of the October 10, 2013 Town Hall forum demonstrate that there was a clear disconnect between Commissioner King and the stakeholders impacted by his decisions. We hope that Commissioner King will be more receptive to the needs and concerns of students, parents, teachers and administrators moving forward.

We understand that the Governor has adopted this educational plan and that the Board of Regents and Commissioner King are responsible for implementing it and although we may see it as flawed, there are two sides of the story. It will take patience and a lot of discussion and understanding at the end of the day for all of us to move forward. For these forums to be truly successful, we believe that Commissioner King must make good faith efforts to engage in dialogue with parents, teachers and administrators. With all due respect, he must be ready to face harsh but deserved criticism about flawed decisions and policies. He must be ready to listen to people whose lives have been impacted by these plans day in and day out in classrooms, in homes and around dinner tables across New York State. Absent that, we fear that history may repeat itself.

We appreciate NYSED's gesture and are relieved to hear that NYSED intends to give parents, students, teachers and administrators the opportunity to keep dialogue going on this most important subject. We look forward to participating in the upcoming forums wherever practicable. We thank you in advance for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Anna Shah, Parent of Tyler, 6 - *Spackenkill Union Free School District*

Jennifer Kaufman, Parent of Sean, 17; Abigail, 14; Jake, 14 - *Spackenkill Union Free School District*

Mikey Jackson, Parent of Atticus, 8 - *Cornwall School District*

Joanne Swick Tumolo, Parent of Dominic, 9; Joseph, 7; Robby, 6 - *Mahopac School District*

Jolyn Safron, Parent of Julia, 12; Mira, 15 - *Kingston City School District*