

## C.U.O.M.O.: Can U Overcome My Oppression

Recently I was contemplating all that has gone on in education, in particular in New York State. For those who know me this comes as no surprise.

I have watched NY Governor Andrew Cuomo preside over the systematic degradation and attempted destruction of public education, teachers, and unions in general (not just the teachers' Union...ask any PEF member). I have seen him time and time again say one thing to gain power and support, from those who do not have millions of dollars to donate, only to go back on his word to them. In essence he uses, manipulates, gains a greater stranglehold on power in NYS, and tosses them aside. He has declared war on teachers for not supporting him enough, on unions for daring to disagree with some of his policies, threw his promises to the Working Families party aside after he was reelected, and totally and completely ignored and disrespected parents across the state regarding the education of their children.

He claims to be fighting for the students of the state. Apparently he does not feel the teachers and parents of these very same students do not care about their success and happiness in life; after all what do we know, as parents and educators we only see these children EVERY SINGLE DAY! He seems to be big on charter schools and school choice. But let's take a closer look at policies that have been done during his reign.

First I want to talk about the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). In the last year of Governor David Patterson's administration he passed the GAP elimination in order to balance the state budget ([http://sap.questar.org/publications/taxcap/GEA\\_fs2014.pdf](http://sap.questar.org/publications/taxcap/GEA_fs2014.pdf) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGgwYX6phps&feature=youtu.be&noredirect=1> ). Essentially what it did was remove a substantial chunk of funding from education to help balance the state budget. It was presented as one year fix. One of Andrew Cuomo's main campaign promises in his first election was that one of the first actions he would take would be to reinstate that funding to education. In his first term he did not live up to his word....he had four years to rid of the GEA and did not. The truly unfortunate part of this is that the ones suffering most are the children in the state's most needy districts; those districts have taken the largest financial hit. Governor Cuomo made the conscious decision to starve schools of the funding necessary to meet the needs of all children. All the while keeping many or all educational mandates in place; mandates that were now not funded. This led to cuts upon cuts in districts across the state which made the job of actually educating our children more difficult. He then created the tax cap. To the average voter (those who actually take the time to vote) this sounded great...less taxes. It was a shrewd political move by Andrew, it received public support and furthered his agenda of weakening public education (and any union associated with it...not just teachers' unions). Again, this led to more cuts upon cuts in districts across the state, which in turn made the job of actually educating our children that much more difficult. Once again mandates were not eased to assist in balancing this further loss of funding.

All the while he verbally assaults teachers and educators across the state as failures.

Once the majority of districts in the state were at their weakest financial point he accepts RTTT money and agrees to all facets of Common Core in order to get federal money. He agrees to implement CCSS into the lives of our children sight unseen! He does this "for the good of the children" as our schools were in dire financial straits.....a position that he himself put our schools, children, and communities in! He sold local control to the feds in order to further his agendas.

Along with RTTT and Common Core money comes the hammer he has been looking for...a way to really destroy the teachers and any remaining strength they have to protect the kids and communities they live in: The NYS Assessments...he will use rigged data to show how "bad" our teachers are. I say rigged because of the following information I submit for your consideration regarding the NYS Assessment test scores.

I submit to you that the NYS data is skewed, unreliable, and invalid and any conclusions made based on this data are baseless, unfounded, and unacceptable. These are the reasons:

- \* Flawed test construction
- \* Tests were too long; even high achieving students did not finish
- \* Vague questions and reading passages full of commercial logos and distracting product placements
- \* Passages from test maker Pearson's text books used, thus giving some students an advantage
- \* Formula used to determine "cut scores" is flawed and not supported by scientific research:(“cut scores” are the cut-off scores for determining proficiency)
- \* Cut scores for the assessments were not developed until AFTER the tests were administered and scored. THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE DATA IS HIGHLY VULNERABLE TO MANIPULATION.
- \* NYSED identified the top 8-20th % scores on the NAEP, SAT and PSAT and used these scores to work backwards and determine the scores a child must receive on state assessments in grades 3-8 to eventually meet these benchmarks. In other words, in order to be proficient on a NYS test, ALL students must achieve scores comparable to the top8-20% of students in the country. This is extremely high and sets children up for failure.
- \* Research that shows that high scores on these tests are not effective indicators of performance in college. High school grades are in fact a better indicator of college performance.
- \* Tests like the NAEP and the SAT are not curriculum measures and therefore, are not appropriate for determining cut scores on the NYS ELA and Math tests.

No oversight or transparency in scoring or test construction:

- \* The tests were not and will not be made available in their entirety for public inspection and were destroyed after being scored and sent back to the state.
- \* Teachers involved in scoring the tests and those hired to make recommendations to the Commissioner of Education regarding the formulation of cut scores were made to sign non-disclosure agreements.
- \* Not designed to improve student learning
- \* Due to test secrecy and the fact that scores are received after the school year has ended there is no opportunity for teachers to review the tests and provide students with extra support in areas of weakness.

I am sure there are people better versed in statistics than I who can say more about this abominable situation and its statistical inaccuracies.

Now Mr. Cuomo has been elected a second time and has continued his legacy of lies. Rather than keep his deal with Working Families party, a coalition of labor unions and other groups, they are already feeling betrayed. "Andrew has no beliefs beyond his own blind ambition," said a leader of the Working Families Party. "Shame on us for believing Cuomo

would keep his word,” another Working Families Party leader said (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/gonzalez-cuomo-won-not-supporters-happy-article-1.1999633> ). Another irony is Cuomo’s “push” for the Women’s Equality Act. What is the irony you may ask? Seventy-five percent of NYSUT members are women; that is close to ½ million college educated women....all under assault by a Governor with an axe to grind. His most deceitful action, in my opinion, refusing to sign HIS OWN BILL! “ALBANY – In June, Gov. Andrew Cuomo negotiated and proposed a bill that claimed to ‘protect New York’s standing as a national leader in teacher evaluation.’ On Monday, Cuomo vetoed the very same bill, saying it doesn’t ‘fix the foundational issues with the teacher evaluation system.’” He rejected his own legislation, which would have temporarily removed Common Core-based student test scores from the evaluation scores of teachers who rated poorly. The veto came after the state Education Department released the latest round of evaluation scores, which showed 95 percent of New York public teachers were rated “effective” or “highly effective” last school year. The evaluation system he is dissatisfied with was initiated with his approval and blessing! Essentially by vetoing his own bill regarding an evaluation system that he had input into is that “teachers are the only ones who should be held accountable for the state’s failed implementation of the Common Core.”

- Common Core that HE signed onto sight unseen
- RTTT monies that HE decided to take
- An evaluation system that had HIS stamp of approval
- Let’s not forget John King, an education commissioner that had CUOMO’s complete support
- The words and actions HE has chosen to speak and do respectively

When does accountability arrive on HIS door step?

It won’t. Unless we the people...remember that phrase...WE THE PEOPLE?

It is we the people that MUST come together. At the time of this writing Mr. Cuomo’s State of the State address is on January 21st, 2015...less than 3 weeks away. In the less than two months since re-election he has already betrayed women, the Working Families, educators, and as a result of all of these things our children and communities.

Who has he not betrayed? Answer: Millionaire donors and hedge fund managers. He will not ever betray them for two reasons: 1) his lust for personal power which he needs their capital for; 2) He has never possessed the heart of his father.

His father, may he rest in peace, was a champion of the middle class; the son pales in his shadow. It is a great and sad tragedy that Mario’s ultimate legacy is a son that appears to be ruled by narcissism, avarice, a gluttonous lust for power, wrath, and excessive pride.

-John S.

Educator, parent, citizen activist fighting to #stopcommoncore.

Please join the fight:

<http://www.nysape.org>