3-1-2006

Correspondence; 2006-03-01; Gordon Gross

Catherine Collins

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Recommended Citation
Collins, Catherine, "Correspondence; 2006-03-01; Gordon Gross" (2006). Correspondence. 19.
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March 1, 2006

Dr. Catherine Collins  
Buffalo Board of Education  
65 Niagara Square  
Room 801 City Hall  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Dr. Collins:

I very much appreciated you sending to me the report of the Charter School Moratorium Task Force of the Buffalo Board of Education.

I was sorry to read about the two year moratorium on Charter Schools, though I realize that Superintendent Williams and the Board has a myriad of issues to deal with, not the least of which are financial. I believe the chances of our public schools receiving from New York State more than inflation adjusted increases are slim at best. For years taxpayers have been throwing more and more money at our public schools (even adjusting for inflation) with less and less to show for it. For many years our public schools have been failing our children. While the reasons for this failure are not one dimensional, it is interesting to note that during the same period, on an inflation adjusted basis, teachers’ salaries and their many fringe benefits have increased substantially. Furthermore, restrictions under which our teachers work (primarily flexibility of their hours to teach and/or help children after those hours) have become more restrictive.

As you know, the Charter School movement is an attempt to reverse the results in educating our children so that they can be properly equipped to deal with the ever increasing and complex demands of our society. To date the overall results for Charter
School students in New York State is most encouraging and although mistakes in granting charters have been made, SUNY's Board has been insistent on revoking those charters when their term is up if they have not been fulfilling their mission. I believe the results will keep improving as these charters gain more experience.

A major reason for the success of the Charter Schools to date would include a dedicated and flexible teaching staff as well as strong parental involvement. Since the teachers aren't tenured, the teaching staffs are dedicated and motivated to do the job regardless of some extra hours ....... or they will not last very long. While the Buffalo educational system has many dedicated and well qualified teachers, there are also many who have benefitted by early tenure but who are not so motivated.

In any event, I would question whether money is going to solve Buffalo schools' problems. Certainly it hasn't in the past. It seems to me that the challenge for you and the rest of the Board as well as Superintendent Williams is to deal with this reality. As it is, New York State taxpayers are over-taxed and, as you know, have been fleeing the State for years. Now, between taxes, fees and excessive regulation, the business climate in New York is about as bad as it gets in this country. That's why, outside of Metropolitan New York City, few new jobs are generated in the rest of the State. That means that every year there are fewer of us to pay for the State's existing infrastructure and increasing needs, which further continues the acceleration of job loss, etc.

I know your task is a difficult one and I am sure you and your colleagues have a sincere desire to improve the quality of education in Buffalo. I would urge you and your colleagues however to start thinking out of the box since it is imperative that our children receive a better education.

Sincerely yours,

Gordon R. Gross

GRG/ems

GRG/ems