

Building the skills to compete in the 21st Century economy: Elementary & Secondary Education

Education is a ladder to the middle class, and investing in education will grow our economy because businesses want to locate near a pipeline of well-educated, well-trained workers. To create jobs over the long term, we have to make sure our kids have access to affordable, quality education.

I. Ken Wagner, Ph.D. is the right person to lead the Rhode Island Department of Education

He has a track record of putting student learning first, and will provide a steady hand to support students and enhance educator effectiveness. He is a collaborative leader, and has a track record of listening to and engaging teachers, parents, and students. He is a champion of educational equity and believes in high expectations for all students.

A Steady Hand Who Listens to and Engages Students, Educators, and Parents:

Ken grew up in a family of modest means and has a proven record of working hard, and of engaging with and listening to classroom teachers. He's served in many roles at the school, district and state levels, including:

- Local school board representative who was elected while still in high school at the age of 18
- School psychologist in Freeport Union Free School District, NY
- Middle School Assistant Principal and Principal in Herricks and Shoreham-Wading River School Districts, NY
- District Administrator for Shoreham-Wading River CSD and Eastern Suffolk BOCES, NY
- New York State Department of Education (NYSED) where he held positions responsible for curriculum, technology, and data, most recently the senior deputy commissioner for education policy

A Career-Long Focus on Building Consensus and Promoting Student Learning:

- Led the development of EngageNY, a free curriculum aligned with new learning standards that has been downloaded by teachers across the country more than 20 million times. <https://www.engageny.org/>
- Supported the expansion of early childhood learning, implemented higher learning standards, and helped provide multiple pathway options to graduation, including early college high school experiences.
- Supported the strengthening of programs for English Language learners, students with special needs, and career and technical education students.
- As a principal, provided instructional leadership for teachers, promoted personalized student learning, led interdisciplinary teacher teams, and facilitated and prioritized parent engagement.

II. Dr. Wagner In His Own Words

On his approach to education: "I approach my work with a rigorous commitment to open, honest dialogue with the people who matter the most – the students, families, teachers and principals – the people on the ground doing the hard work every day that makes learning happen."

On involvement: "It's important that everyone *be* involved because education is a shared responsibility. Everyone has a stake in the outcome: teachers, families, employers, community leaders and most of all, students."

On learning: "I'm dedicated to promoting personalized student learning, where every student is a part of a rigorous learning environment that meets their individual needs."

III. The Selection Process

The Governor hosted numerous listening sessions to gather thoughts on the next Commissioner:

- She engaged dozens of teachers, students, parents, school leaders, and superintendents across the state for their feedback on the traits needed in our next Commissioner;
- Common themes emerged -- stakeholders wanted a leader who listens, and who is collaborative, thoughtful and student-centered. Dr. Wagner fits this description.

After the listening session ended, there was a nationwide search.

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Education will consider Dr. Wagner's nomination on Monday, July 13.

"I was one of more than 150 stakeholders who saw firsthand the effectiveness of Governor Raimondo's Listening Sessions," said **Michael Crudale, Principal of Park View Middle School**. "For more than two months, the Governor and her team engaged with the community about finding an Education Commissioner who was a passionate, receptive and student-centered leader. Park View was fortunate to host a Listening Session, which was a thoughtful approach to gathering feedback from a wide spectrum of Rhode Islanders. Community input is crucial in making such a significant decision and I am proud that picking a Commissioner was a statewide effort to best serve our students."

IV. What Others Say About Dr. Wagner

Greg Ahlquist, 2013 New York State Teacher of the Year and Social Studies teacher at Webster Thomas High School: "Ken is a collaborative and visionary leader. He actively works to include the teacher's voice and I can personally point to numerous times where Ken has empowered (me and other) teachers to have direct input in state level curriculum and assessment work."

Theresa Gray, Coordinator, Integrated Educational Services at Erie 2 BOCES: "Ken Wagner has always acted with integrity as New York State made significant changes in standards, assessment and professional review. He has listened to stakeholders, shared the reasoning behind decision making and has always sought the best outcome possible after weighing all options. He could always be counted on to be a voice of reason, even while political storms swirled in the state and his leadership will be missed."

Rick Longhurst, Executive Director of the New York State PTA: "Ken Wagner brought parents and families to the table as valuable partners in the education process. He reached out to us for ideas and feedback. He collaborated with us to present complex testing concepts to our members and readily engaged in dialogue over sometimes controversial State and Federal policies. Even when we disagreed, he remained fully accessible, committed to true family engagement and determined to maintain productive two way communication. Rhode Island is gaining a valuable leader. New York will be losing a true friend and partner. We wish him the very best in his new role."

Heather Mahoney, MORIC Director and Chairwoman of NYS RIC Directors: "During his time at NYSED, Ken worked closely with the Regional Information Centers (RICs) to implement an array of initiatives aligned with the Regents' Reform Agenda. As Ken worked with us to implement these innovative data and technology programs, he demonstrated his talent, expertise, courage and dedication to students. The Regents' Reform Agenda brought aggressive and rapid change to our education system. Ken understood the challenges associated with the changes and the importance of leveraging expertise from across the state and country. Ken worked to ensure high-quality resources were available to support educators, administrators, staff developers and parents via the EngageNY website. His comprehensive approach to provide tangible resources in the area of curriculum and instruction are unprecedented. Most notably, Ken consistently demonstrated his willingness to discuss opportunities and challenges in order to ensure effective decision-making. We wish Ken the best of luck in his new endeavors in Rhode Island."

Anita Murphy, Superintendent, Altmar Parish Williamstown Central Schools (and former associate commissioner at NYSED): "No matter what the size of the school district Ken is always responsive to the needs and concerns of the field. He not only holds a high standard of excellence for policy and practice but he is also committed to finding and developing resources to support teachers, principals and superintendents in schools and districts. Ken goes above and beyond to collaborate across all departments in service of finding solutions that support high quality teaching and learning for all students."

Kenneth Slentz, Superintendent, Skaneateles School District (and former deputy commissioner at NYSED): "While in New York, Ken was elevated to the deputy role because of his obvious intellect, but also because of his humility in the work. This was best evidenced by his consistent outreach to the field on a wide variety of matters. Whether it was the 'Friday calls' that Ken initiated with superintendents and assistant superintendents on matters of curriculum, instruction, and assessments; his meetings with the directors of NYS Regional Information Center on issues related to data systems and instructional technology; or his ad hoc groups formed to respond to particular issues, Ken remembered his principal roots and included smart minds to inform his thinking and recommended actions."