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State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia. | AP Photo

## Educators call on State Ed to delay early childhood learning standards again

By KESHIA CLUKEY | 11/10/2016 05:39 AM EST

ALBANY — Hundreds of educators and school administrators are calling on the state Education Department and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to take a closer look at the pre-kindergarten-through second grade-English language arts learning standards.

“The work we did this summer was unfinished,” said Peter Rawitsch, who has been teaching for 40 years and served on the department’s P-2 ELA standard review panel.

“Early childhood is a special time for young children to grow and develop the skills,” Rawitsch, a first grade teacher in Glenmont, told POLITICO New York. “Each child is unique and just the idea of having standards for a group of children who develop at different rates seems contradictory to me.”

Rawitsch and more than 300 others signed a letter to be sent Thursday to state Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, the state Board of Regents and Cuomo calling for a moratorium on the use of the P-2 ELA standards. The other signees included teachers, administrators, test refusal activists and teacher educators. The letter was prepared and sent out by the education consulting firm ECE PolicyWorks.

The letter, provided to POLITICO New York, calls for increased discussion on the P-2 ELA standards, as well as more time for public comment, which the groups says is not provided for in the state’s current review of the standards.

“The purpose of the moratorium is really to hold New York State accountable for a transparent process and to ensure the new P-2 ELA task force has a chance to do its work,” said ECE PolicyWorks founder Susan Ochshorn. “I met with teachers and they are feeling a sense of being dismissed and being relegated to the side lines.”

The state Education Department said it was committed to properly reviewing and revising the standards.

“Developing the right learning standards for our students has been, and continues to be, an evolving process that involves the input of as many individuals as possible. The more educators and parents who provide feedback and expertise the better,” department spokesman Jonathan Burman told POLITICO New York in an email. “School districts will not be asked to implement the revised learning standards until they have been thoroughly vetted by the public and approved by the Board of Regents. We are taking many positive steps in that direction, but we are not there yet.”

The state Education Department, on recommendation from the governor’s task force, is in the process of reviewing and revising the Common Core learning standards in the hopes of quelling public concern over how they were rolled out, as well as ameliorating the growing test refusal movement that came out of those concerns.

The department conducted a survey of the standards and a state listening tour and then convened review committees comprised of teachers, administrators, parents and higher education representatives from across the state. The committees were tasked with

reviewing the standards, analyzing whether they are age-appropriate and looking at the need for clarifications on the terminology, as well as whether or not they are cohesive from pre-kindergarten through high school.

The committee on P-2 ELA, however, did not come to a consensus, according to Rawitsch.

“It was very disappointing because many of the things that the group wanted to talk about were not being addressed,” he said. “We didn’t really have the voice in the process that we thought we’d have.”

The committees met for a week in July and then those selected for the P-2 ELA committee met again in August for another three days, Rawitsch said.

The department in mid-September released a draft of the revised state standards, which are out for public comment through Nov. 14 (the period was extended from the original date of Nov. 4 to provide more time for public comment).

At the time of their release, the department also announced the creation of an Early Learning Task Force to further discuss the P-2 standards. The department Tuesday posted a notice seeking applications for individuals who would like to serve on the committee.

The task force members, which will include about 30 educators and parents, will be identified before the end of the year and will hold their first meeting early in 2017, according to the department. Their determinations will be incorporated in to the revisions before the draft standards are presented to the Regents in 2017, according to the department.

The department had previously said the standards would go before the Regents in early 2017, with plans to help districts train teachers and incorporate the standards into the curriculum for the 2017-18 school year. They would then be incorporated into the state exams, which are also under review.

The educators and advocates sending the letter argue the timeline still is too short.

“There’s a lot more to be discussed,” Rawitsch said. “Let’s put that on hold and let the task force do their job...and then have a public review of those [revised standards] and then it should to go to the Regents.”

Rawitsch said he planned to volunteer for the new task force, but all previous P-2 ELA committee members received an email from the education department Wednesday saying members would not be selected to serve on the task force.

The department stood by the current process.

“[T]he revised standards will not be implemented in classrooms until we are comfortable that they are the best ones possible for our students and our teachers,” Burman said.

Read more on the Early Learning Task Force here: <http://bit.ly/2fySLwz>.

View the letter from the concerned educators here: <http://bit.ly/2fz4n2j>.

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