FORUM MEMBERS MEETING – JUNE 2, 2016

Forum President Howie Nadel introduced Congressman Eliot Engle, who gave a few words of welcome.

Howie stated that this was his final meeting as President of the Forum. He welcomed participation and change.

Randy Guggenheim gave the Treasurer’s report. Membership is at about 400 members. The Board is in a strong fiscal position but is operating at a loss as expected.

Main Program Presentation: Judith Johnson, the New York State Regent

Judith has now served for over one year as a Regent. The composition of the Board of Regents has changed significantly over the last year and a half, including the addition of nine women, five who have been superintendents/policy practitioners.

Teacher evaluation: modifications have been made (but the law remains in place). Some test scores are still used to measure the successfulness of a teacher; the formula is flawed. Revisions to the program are set for 2019. As a result, teacher candidates have dropped precipitously. The tests for certification for becoming a teacher are being challenged; they are flawed. For example, current teachers must take a common core test, but the schools did not teach this component. Fewer than 50 people graduated from Pace’s teacher program.

One of the problems is that the legislators and the governor have indicated that if school districts don’t follow the policies, they won’t get state aid. While this would hurt Scarsdale, it would really hurt Yonkers and other districts more dependent on state aid.

The Chancellor of the Regents has started a research group, since the policies are not backed by research. Universities, researches and laboratories have approached the group to help.

Pathways to graduation: we can’t have a one size fits all policy. A Regents’ diploma is a prerequisite to graduation, passing all five Regents tests. They are developing other pathways for special education students. Consider what are the unintended consequences of the policies.

The bilingual seal on diplomas: we should be teaching two languages from the start. The schools can acknowledge bilingual speakers; the areas can designate the bilingual speakers keyed to the population.

Development of test questions: currently based on critical thinking. Students need to be able to describe how they come to answers. Innovations in technology will free people up to do more creative work.

No industrialized country tests students as much as we do. Does this measure success? Goal is to develop people who will work collaboratively and creatively with others. Testing does not necessarily measure this.

Schools should function as community centers, providing resources to help students thrive.

Respect for teachers. Public school teachers are vilified. Ineffective teachers exist; they should be identified and removed, but the entire profession should not be tarred. Achievement does not improve if teachers are fired, and there is a shortage of teachers.

Standardized tests and test stores are not the sole determinant as to achievement of students. Children need to learn social and civic skills as well as academics. If done in the right way, demonstrating knowledge is important.

Why does the achievement gap still exist? The promise of public schools was that all students could reach their potential; the public schools were the great equalizer. This premise is no longer true.

No Child Left Behind: The new act was intended to return power to the states. In poor districts need federal money to supplement the budgets.

Poverty: the worst performing schools have the highest percentage of poor families. 40% of students in NY State live in poverty, so these students cannot be ignored. Universal education is a core precept of democracy.

New initiative: community schools, open for more hours. Kids get backpacks full of food for the weekend. There are food pantries, doctors, dentists and other services to give the kids a good start. There will be 100 community schools in the next ten years, in Ossining, Yonkers, and Peekskill.

Ms. Johnson then fielded questions from the audience.

Nominating Committee for next year: Howie Nadel will be chair, joined by Mayra Kirkendall-Rodriquez, Carlos Ramirez, Timothy Foley and Robert Harrison

The Forum slate for next year, announced by BK Munguia (chair of the past year’s nominating committee): President Lena Crandall; VP Mary Louise Perlman; Treasurer Randy Guggenheimer; Secretary Susan Douglass: and new Directors at Large Matthew Martin, Eli Mattioli, and Carlos Ramirez. The motion to accept the nominees passed unanimously.

Members of the 2015 -16 Nominating Committee included Robert Berg, Chair, Linda Blair, Carrie Fishman, and Andrew Sereyski.

The Nominating Committee for 2016-17 was approved by the membership. It includes Howard Nadel, Chair, Mayra Kirkendall-Rodriquez, Timothy Foley, Carlos Rodriguez and Robert Harrison.

Lena thanked Howie for his service on the Forum.

Lena gave introductory remarks. She is looking to bring a fresh approach to the Forum, the oldest civic group in town. She noted that even non-citizens could become involved in democracy by joining the Forum.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.