

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
“Fighting for Change”**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Dr. John Jackson is President and CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education. He delivered a speech at Hofstra University this year, at the meeting where we presented the 2009 *Long Island Index*. Discussing some of the *Index* findings, he asked a simple, direct question:

What are you going to do about it?

I've been wondering that myself. The data in the report, about the structure of Long Island's education system, is clear. It spells out in inescapable detail what many have long observed:

- That while many of our schools are doing fine, many others are not.
- That our 100-plus separate school districts, drawing funds mostly from local taxes, spend vastly different amounts on their students.
- That these differences result in unequal educational opportunity for our children.
- That the greatest resources do not go where needs are greatest.
- That educational outcomes suffer as a result.

The *Index* also spells out the risk this poses. In an increasingly competitive, technology-driven economy, Long Island is already losing ground to other regions. We simply cannot afford to leave our children undereducated.

The information is clear and compelling. And people get it. That's clear from an opinion survey the *Index* conducted, which shows solid majority support for systemic educational reform. Today 64% of Long Islanders support consolidating school districts; 66% favor creating magnet schools; 64% favor allowing children in failing school districts to attend better schools in nearby districts; and 61% support lower-income housing in middle-class and wealthier neighborhoods.

The desire for change is there. How do we translate it into action?

I've written often in these pages about the need for leadership. I've described how leaders in other regions have come together in alliances that succeed in tackling regional problems.

I have long wished to see something like that here on Long Island, but it just keeps not happening.

That means it's up to ordinary citizens to take the initiative. That's a viable path, too—a path that has effected landmark reforms. It was citizen action that won women the vote, and powered civil rights legislation and environmental protection.

If all the Long Islanders who support school reform actually spoke out for it, I have no doubt things would change. Why, if just one Long Islander in 20—some 50,000 of us—came together and demanded action from the state government . . . we would see real action right quick.

Would that require effort? Moving a bit out of our comfort zone? Yes, it would.

But given Long Island's economic position, and the trend in which it is heading, comfort is not an option. The only choice is between action and decline.

Long Island's problems will not fix themselves, and fixing them will take real effort. You could just pack up and leave—an option that a great many are already choosing.

If you'd rather stay, then prepare to fight.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation. The “Long Island Index” provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit our Website:

www.longislandindex.org