

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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Advocates for Children of
New York

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New York State
Community of Practice on
Family, School and
Community Collaboration

New York State
Disabilities Advocacy
Association and Network

New York State
Rehabilitation Association

Preliminary Recommendations for Creating Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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We have come together to urge the creation of multiple pathways to a diploma in New York State, each of which holds students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities. We believe that measuring college- and career-readiness requires valuing multiple and equally valid ways to assess the skills needed for success in the workplace and higher education and supports a diversity of learning styles and goals.

Core Principles

We believe that any alternate pathway must:

1. Be available to all students, not just students with disabilities;
2. Not depend on the passing of high-stakes tests;
3. Lead to a regular high school diploma;
4. Allow students to specialize, including in career and technical education, and should not be one-size-fits-all;
5. Begin early and connect with middle school and lower grade curricula yet be flexible enough to benefit students who arrive in high school, change schools frequently or have interrupted education;
6. Build upon and encourage development of individual student strengths;
7. Respect student and family choice after a careful consideration of the student's individual goals and full range of options, with no student being assigned to a pathway without the informed consent of the student and his or her family; and
8. Have value to employers and colleges and make meaningful links to post-secondary opportunities and preparedness.

Preliminary Recommendations for Pathways

Our preliminary research and discussions point to the following ways in which New York can further develop existing alternate pathways or create new pathways to a diploma. We note that none of these pathways is sufficient, by itself, to fully address our concerns, and deciding to implement one should not preclude the State from implementing others or undertaking additional efforts to address the concerns we have raised.

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We recommend that New York:

1. **Create a Pathway That Allows Students to Demonstrate College and Career Readiness through Practitioner-Developed Performance-Based Assessments instead of Standardized Assessments**

Allowing students to demonstrate their competency in ways other than performance on standardized assessments will offer more students a pathway to a diploma. This goal may be accomplished in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:

- **Extending and expanding the work of the New York Performance Standards Consortium schools¹** to increase their capacity to serve more students throughout the State;
- **Allowing districts to build upon the instructor-created performance-based assessment models that currently exist** to more fully develop a performance-based pathway to a diploma that does not require high-stakes exit exams; and/or
- **Creating a statewide mechanism for a performance-based assessment alternative to exit exams.²**

2. **Expand Work-Based Learning and Career and Technical Education Pathways that Connect a Broader Range of Students to Career Opportunities**

Work-based learning and career and technical education can be a powerful way to keep students engaged in school and provide pathways to a diploma and higher education and/or a career. Historically, Career and Technical Education (CTE), at various points in time, has been limited in availability, characterized by segregation and tracking, or unavailable to students with specialized learning needs. To maximize the potential of work-based learning and CTE, the State should:

- Identify model integrated work-based learning approaches and encourage their expansion and replication;
- Foster the development and/or expansion of integrated CTE models that serve students who have historically not had access to CTE, including students with

¹ The New York Performance Standards Consortium is a group of 28 schools across New York State that uses a system of practitioner-developed performance-based assessment in lieu of most standardized tests. For more information, see <http://performanceassessment.org/>.

² Maryland, Washington and Oregon have pathways to graduation that allow students to demonstrate competency using performance-based assessment. Washington has a number of alternate pathways to a diploma, and Maryland has a statewide Bridge Plan for Academic Validation. Both Washington and Maryland require students to take and fail exit exams before embarking on an alternate pathways. Oregon allows students to demonstrate competency by completing district-created performance assessments without taking an exit exam first. None of these models satisfy all of our core principles, but we believe New York should explore whether these systems or elements of these systems could be used to expand opportunities for students here.

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disabilities, students who change schools frequently and students who are learning English; and

- Make quality integrated CTE programs more widely available and accessible.

We believe these CTE pathways should also provide an alternative to high-stakes tests by giving the option of performance-based assessment.

3. In addition to Creating New and Expanded Pathways, Build More Flexibility into the Current System

While more flexibility will not on its own be sufficient to address our concerns, there are a number of ways in which the current pathway to a diploma could be made accessible to more students, including, but not limited to:

- **Creating incentives and removing accountability disincentives for schools to work with overage students**, particularly high school students who may take more than 4 years to graduate;
- **Developing programs that allow for individualized extended-year high school plans**;
- **Building bridges between secondary and post-secondary education** using early college or accelerated learning models to address the needs of struggling students and/or moving innovative college remediation programs into high schools; and/or
- **Creating greater choice in assessments.**

Implementing Multiple Pathways

In creating alternate pathways to a diploma, the Department should take action to ensure that:

- **Pathways are Accessible to the Students Who Need Them**
 - Many of our students have interrupted schooling, move around a lot because of circumstances beyond their control, or are new to the system in high school. These students should be able to access these pathways even if they miss application deadlines or decide to move between pathways.
 - Where alternative school models and CTE programming exists, they are often not accessible to the students who most need options because they are limited in availability or not able to meet their specific instructional needs (e.g., provide special education services, ELL programming, and/or intensive literacy instruction). Programming must be expanded or new models developed to create meaningful choices.

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- **Student and Parent Choices are Supported**
 - Schools and districts must clearly and effectively communicate options
 - Guidance services must be strengthened to support student and parent choice, and to ensure that forced tracking does not occur.
- **If Districts Determine Which Pathways to Provide, They Provide an Appropriate Range of Choices**