



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: The Impact of Standardized Testing on Graduation

November 25, 2013

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Good afternoon. My name is Abja Midha and I am a project director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students who are learning English, students with disabilities, and students of color. Advocates for Children also coordinates the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma, a statewide coalition of educational and advocacy organizations and families who have come together to urge the creation of multiple pathways to a diploma in New York State, each of which holds all students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities.

At Advocates for Children, we see the impact of high-stakes standardized testing in a variety of ways, including cumbersome processes for providing accommodations to students with disabilities and English Language Learners. I'm



going to focus my testimony today on high school exit exams.

In New York City, 39.6 percent of high school students fail to graduate from high school within four years.¹ The figures are even higher for students with disabilities and English language learners, at 72.4 percent and 64.6 percent, respectively. Many of these students do not graduate high school because they are unable to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on high-stakes standardized exit exams.

New York State has among the most onerous high school exit exam requirements in the nation. All students must pass five Regents exams in order to graduate from a New York public high school: English-Language Arts, Math, Science, World History, and United States History. While we support high standards of student achievement, based on our experiences working with New York City youth, we believe that the State's focus on high-stakes standardized exit exams creates unnecessary barriers to graduation. For example, Advocates for Children recently worked with a 22-year-old who attended a comprehensive high school in New York City and has taken the Regents examinations 37 times over the course of the past 6 years. This student had excellent attendance throughout high school and passed all of his classes on his first try. He also finished the twelfth grade on time,

¹ Source: New York State Education Department, Graduation Rates 2013.



having earned all of the credits he needed to graduate, and also having passed all of the courses necessary to earn an Automotive Career and Technical Education (CTE) certificate. He loved his automotive classes and during his senior year applied to technical colleges where he could continue to study automotive sciences and start his career as an auto mechanic. However, because he had yet to pass the exams necessary to earn his diploma, his school could not release his CTE certificate and he could not start college.

Without a high school diploma, students are denied access to college and careers. It is time for New York State to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and take responsibility for the thousands of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school because of high-stakes standardized testing. Specifically, we recommend that the State:

1. Reduce the number of Regents exams required to graduate from 5 to 3. The English Regents, one Math Regents, and one Science Regents still would be required for graduation. Maintaining exam requirements in these subjects would give the State the flexibility to use these assessments to comply with federal testing requirements under No Child Left Behind.
2. Develop a pathway to graduation that allows all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through performance-based assessments in lieu of the Regents exams. Performance-based assessments allow students to



show their attainment of standards by completing a series of tasks/projects in contexts that are familiar and relevant to their high school experiences.

We urge the City Council to call upon the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents to create viable paths to graduation and college and career readiness for our students that do not rely on high-stakes standardized testing. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.