

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

Coordinator: Abja Midha • amidha@advocatesforchildren.org • 212-822-9502

October 22, 2015

BY EMAIL

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

RE: 4+1 Pathway to a High School Diploma

Dear Commissioner Elia:

We are writing on behalf of the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma, a state-wide coalition with more than 60 members, including advocates, teachers, administrators, parents and youth, representing a broad cross-section of students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and economically disadvantaged students. While we believe strongly that developing multiple instructional pathways to a diploma is essential for the success of many NYS students, members of the Coalition are concerned that access to emerging instructional pathways (e.g. Career and Technical Education (CTE)) is limited for many students and that high-stakes standardized exit exams act as a barrier to high school graduation in New York State for students who have otherwise mastered New York State standards and are college or career ready.

We are writing in regards to the “4+1” pathway to a high school diploma, which the Board of Regents adopted in January 2015 and which allows students to substitute a State-approved assessment for one of the required Regents exams. We strongly support increasing flexibility in assessment, as well as providing students with an array of instructional options to attempt to promote student engagement and achievement. However, as we have expressed in our previous letters to the State Education Department (SED) and Board of Regents, members of the Coalition remain very concerned that the 4 + 1 pathway is not doing nearly enough to improve access to graduation for the 24 percent of New York State students who do not graduate within 4 years.

Advocates for Children of New York • Alliance for Quality Education • Annenberg Institute for School Reform • ARISE Coalition • Lynn Bass, Principal, Tapestry Charter High School • David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center • Brooklyn Defender Services • Bronx Independent Living Services • BronxWorks • Brooklyn Center for the Disabled • Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective • Business Teachers Association of New York State • Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce • Capital Region Refugee Roundtable • Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York • Citizens' Committee for Children of New York • Council for a Strong America • Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies • Council of New York Special Education Administrators • Valerie DeClara, Parent • Robert Dodd, New York City Special Education Teacher • Families Together in New York State • Ann Marie FitzPatrick, Parent • Flanwayan Haitian Literacy Project • Good Shepherd Services • Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate • Lorri Gumanow, Parent and Special Educator • Holly Gurnick, Parent • Shelley Hubal, Parent • Jill Lewis-Flood, Parent • Meghan Healy • INCLUDEnyc • Internationals Network for Public Schools • Lawyers for Children, Inc. • Learning Disabilities Association of New York State • Long Island Advocacy Center • Long Island Communities of Practice • Noreen Maher, Parent • Diana Mendez, Parent • Mental Health Association of New York City • Neighborhood Family Services Coalition • New York Immigration Coalition • New York Lawyers for Public Interest • New York Performance Standards Consortium • New York State Association for Bilingual Education • New York State Coalition of 853 Schools • New York State Community of Practice on Family, School and Community Collaboration • New York State Disabilities Advocacy Association and Network • New York State Independent Living Council, Inc. • New York State Rehabilitation Association • New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages • NY Stop Grad HST • Regina Paleau, Parent • Parent to Parent New York, Inc. • Queens Community House • Lynn Russo, Parent • Tracey Shannon, Parent • Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center • The Advocacy Center • United We Stand • Upward Bound • Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools • Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate • YOUTH POWER!

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At this time, we ask SED to provide an update on the status of its review and identification of additional approved assessments that can be used to meet the “+1” assessment requirement. Although the 4+1 pathway was adopted in January 2015, there are still no approved assessments to pursue the arts or foreign language pathways. Although there are more than 1,000 approved CTE programs across the state and more than 150,000 students enrolled in these programs, there are only 13 approved CTE assessments, which by SED's own estimates, will only benefit approximately 1,000 students across the state. We urge SED to prioritize the identification of additional assessments so that they can be made available to students who are eligible to graduate during the 2015-2016 school year. Moreover, as part of the review of additional assessments, we urge SED to consider alternatives to high-stakes standardized exams, such as performance-based assessments. Few students who presently struggle unsuccessfully to demonstrate their mastery of standards on 5 Regents exams are likely to fare any better with the 4+1 option, which still requires them to take 4 Regents exams and 1 other high-stakes standardized test, such as the AP, IB or SAT subject tests.

Additionally, based on our Coalition's wide range of experience, many of the 24 percent of students who do not currently graduate do not have access to the coursework required to pursue any of the pathways for which there are approved assessments. We continue to urge SED to develop a plan to address this lack of access to coursework and ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from all approved instructional pathways.

We also urge SED and the Board of Regents to conduct an ongoing analysis of the impact of the 4+1 pathway starting with the June 2015 and August 2015 graduation rates and to share the results of this analysis with the public. In particular, we ask that you review the impact of the 4+1 pathway on student subpopulations that have traditionally been more likely to struggle with the State's exit exam requirements, including students with disabilities, ELLs, low-income students, and Black and Latino students.

While we hope that the approval of additional assessments and improved access to coursework associated with the approved assessments will lead to an increase in the number of students who will benefit from the 4+1 pathway, we believe that the 4+1 pathway on its own will not be enough to have a significant impact on graduation rates. We continue to urge the State to revisit graduation requirements so that students who are at risk of not graduating have an opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of state standards in different ways. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Change the number of exit exams required to graduate from 5 to 3.
- Develop performance-based assessments and make them available to all students in lieu of each Regents exam.
- Build more flexibility into the current system by expanding access to the already-existing appeals process.

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We outline the above recommendations in greater detail in our report, *Rethinking Pathways to High School Graduation in New York State: Forging New Ways for Students to Show Their Achievement of Standards*, which can be found [here](#).

We would welcome the opportunity to have a conversation with you to introduce our coalition and discuss the urgent need for additional pathways to a high school diploma in New York State. Please let me know your availability for a meeting with our representatives. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Abja Midha
Coalition Coordinator

cc:	Chancellor Tisch	Vice Chancellor Bottar	Regent Tallon	Regent Tilles
	Regent Bendit	Regent Rosa	Regent Young	Regent Cea
	Regent Finn	Regent Norwood	Regent Cashin	Regent Cottrell
	Regent Brown	Regent Chin	Regent Ouderkirk	Regent Johnson
	Regent Collins	Deputy Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green		