

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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

September 29, 2015

BY EMAIL

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

RE: Consideration of Project-Based Assessments as Alternatives to Regents Exams

Dear Commissioner Elia:

We are writing in response to the announcement at the September Regents meeting that the Department will be exploring project-based assessments as an option for students with disabilities who are unable to pass the Regents exams after one or more attempts. We were pleased to learn that the Department is considering alternatives to Regents exams for students with disabilities. However, we urge you to broaden the scope of the review so that all students who struggle with Regents exams are given the opportunity to access project-based assessments. For students who have mastered State standards, but are unable to demonstrate their knowledge on high-stakes standardized tests, the Regents exams are not only a source of stress and anxiety, but they also serve as an unnecessary barrier to high school graduation.

We also urge the Department to offer project-based assessments in lieu of Regents exams so that students do not have to first fail the Regents exams before accessing project-based assessments. Requiring students to attempt the exam one or more times and then complete a project-based assessment requires students and schools to spend time and resources on test prep when they could be engaged in learning and mastering new material. Based on our experiences, students who feel discouraged after their first attempt may give up on school all together, which contributes to higher dropout rates. With 24 percent of students failing to graduate within 4 years, there is an urgent need to

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 • Flanbwayan 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!

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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

revise exit exam requirements in New York State, while maintaining high standards and promoting college or career readiness.

The Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma has released a report, *Rethinking Pathways to High School Graduation in New York State: Forging New Ways for Students to Show Their Achievement of Standards*, which outlines our recommendations for revising New York State 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. The report provides an overview of pathways offered by other states, including project-based assessments. One of our key recommendations in this report is to develop a pathway in New York State that allows all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through State-developed and/or approved performance-based assessments, by completing a series of tasks/projects in contexts that are familiar and relevant to their high school experiences, in lieu of the Regents exams. Specifically, we recommend that the State review the experiences of Maryland, Washington and New Jersey, all of which have provided students with performance-based options. A copy of our report is attached and can also be found [here](#).

We encourage the Department to engage stakeholders in its review of alternatives to the Regents exams prior to the December Regents meeting, at which time the Department has indicated it will be presenting options for consideration to the Board of Regents. Given our research in this area, we respectfully request that the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma be included in any stakeholder discussions. In addition, we would welcome the opportunity to introduce you to our coalition and discuss the urgent need for multiple pathways in New York's current education environment. Please let us know your availability for an in-person 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		
	Assistant Commissioner James DeLorenzo			