

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

Coordinator: Ashley Grant • agrant@advocatesforchildren.org • 212-822-9548

November 20, 2017

BY EMAIL

Chancellor Betty Rosa
New York State Board of Regents
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

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

Re: Support for a State Commission on Graduation Requirements

Dear Chancellor Rosa and Commissioner Elia:

The Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma is writing in support of the proposal put forth by a number of members of the Board of Regents at the October meeting to establish a commission to examine New York State's graduation requirements.

The Coalition is a state-wide coalition with more than 65 members, including advocates, teachers, administrators, parents and youth, representing a broad cross-section of students, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners (English language learners), and economically disadvantaged students. Members of the Coalition are united by the concern that

Advocates for Children of New York • Alliance for Quality Education • Annenberg Institute for School Reform • ARISE Coalition • Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association • David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center • Bronx Independent Living Services • Brooklyn Defender Services • Brooklyn Center for the Disabled • 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 • Lisa Finnerty Coggi, Parent/Advocate • Community Service Society • Council for a Strong America • Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies • Valerie DeClara, Parent • Della DeKay JD, EdD • Max Donatelli, Family Advocate • Irja Estrella, Parent • Families Together in New York State • Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Parent • Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project • Jennifer Ghidui, Big Picture Learning • Michael Godino, Advocate • Good Shepherd Services • Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate • Lori Gummanow, Parent/Special Educator • Meghan Healy • Shelley Hubal, Parent • INCLUDEnyc • Muronji Inman-McCraw • Internationals Network for Public Schools • Lawyers for Children, Inc. • Learning Disabilities Association of New York State • Jill Lewis-Flood, Parent/PIP Member • Long Island Advocacy Center • Long Island Communities of Practice • Chris McNell, Special Education Supervisor/Principal • Diana Medina Mendez, Parent • Mark Anthony Mendez • Mental Health Association of New York City • Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools • Namita Modasra • New York Council of Administrators of Special Education • New York Immigration Coalition • 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. (NYSILC) • New York State Rehabilitation Association • New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYTESOL) • NY Stop Grad HST • Regina Paleau, Parent • Parent to Parent New York, Inc. • Evelyn Perez, Parent • Catherine Phillips-Russ, Baker Victory Services • Sharon Poole, Education for Everyone Consultant • Queens Community House • Lynn Russo, Parent • SCO Family of Services • Tracey Shannon, Parent • Bruce A. Shields, PhD, Associate Professor of Education, Daemen College • Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center • Starbridge • United We Stand • Christian Villenas, PhD • Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate • YOUTH POWER!

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high-stakes standardized exit exams are serving as a barrier to high school graduation for students who have otherwise mastered New York State standards and are college or career ready.

The Coalition supports the creation of a commission focused on rethinking New York's graduation requirements and recommends that the commission consider the following potential changes to New York State diploma requirements:

- **Reduce the number of required exit exams.** As you know, the federal government does not require students to pass exit exams in order to graduate from high school, and 30 states currently require no exit exams at all. As the Power Point¹ presented at the October P-12 meeting affirms, New York has among the most onerous exit exam requirements in the country. The Coalition recommends that the State require no more than the English Regents and one Math Regents for graduation.
- **Develop and support expanding performance-based assessments.** Performance-based assessments (PBAs) can provide students with opportunities to demonstrate proficiency through a series of tasks/projects. We were pleased to see the Regents mention so-called "capstone" projects as a potential future direction, and we encourage the State to consider this possibility and other PBA formats as an option for all New York's students to show what they truly know and can do, while continuing to support existing performance based options
- **Ensure access to pathways for all students.** New York has made notable strides in implementing new pathways to graduation that hold students to high expectations while opening doors to college and career opportunities. As the State examines credit and assessment requirements for existing or new pathways, we urge consideration of ways to ensure that such programs are accessible to diverse student populations, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

The Coalition supports full discussion of the potential benefits and disadvantages of each of these potential changes, as well as consideration of the academic and civic proficiencies that we expect all students to develop over the course of their education. We believe that reliance on standardized tests fails to capture what many students know and can do, and we would welcome an effort to think comprehensively about creating a coherent set of pathways to graduation that gives all students in New York State a fair chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities, while ensuring the inclusion of existing performance based assessment options.

¹ <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/P12%20-%20A%20Discussion%20of%20Diploma%20Requirements.pdf>

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Should the State establish a commission, we urge you to continue to create meaningful mechanisms to gather and incorporate feedback from diverse stakeholders, including parents, students, advocates and educators. These mechanisms should specifically seek input from representatives working with students who currently graduate at lower rates and who may be adversely affected by changes in graduation requirements, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students in temporary housing and foster care, over-age/under-credited youth, and court-involved youth.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments further, please contact Ashley Grant at (212) 822-9548 or agrant@advocatesforchildren.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ashley Grant", followed by a horizontal line.

Ashley Grant
Coalition Coordinator

cc: Members of the Board of Regents
Senior Deputy Commissioner Jhone Ebert
Deputy Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green