

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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January 23, 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: Regents Exams Work Group Recommendations

Dear Chancellor Rosa and Commissioner Elia:

The Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma is writing in regards to the recommendations of the Regents Exams Workgroup, which was discussed at the November 2016 Board of Regents meeting. 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, English Language Learners (ELLs), and economically disadvantaged students. Members of the Coalition are united by the concern that 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. We urge New York State to create multiple instructional and assessment pathways to a high school diploma, each of which holds all students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities.

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!

We were pleased to learn that the Regents Exams Workgroup is recommending revisions to graduation requirements with the goal of minimizing complexity and reducing confusion for families, educators, employers and post-secondary institutions. We agree with the Regents Exams Workgroup about the importance of appeals for students who struggle to display their knowledge on Regents exams, but who have otherwise demonstrated their mastery of standards through coursework. At this time, we respectfully request that you move forward with reviewing the current set of graduation requirements as recommended by the Regents Exam Workgroup and resume discussion of multiple pathways to a diploma, more generally.

In particular, we urge you to revisit the superintendent determination, and extend its availability to all students by the end of this school year so that the class of 2017 may benefit from it. Students with disabilities are not the only student population that struggles with Regents exams. No student should be penalized for not being able to demonstrate their mastery of New York State standards on high-stakes standardized tests. Nor should students be required to fail the Regents exams before having access to the superintendent determination pathway. All students who have otherwise met New York State standards in the required subjects, as evidenced by their classroom performance, should be provided with the opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma using the superintendent determination.

In addition, as you move forward with considering potential changes to New York State's high school graduation requirements, we urge you to develop a transparent process for incorporating the feedback of stakeholders, including parents, students, advocates and educators. We also encourage you to ensure that representatives working with diverse student populations, including English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, students in temporary housing and foster care, over-age and under-credited youth, and court-involved youth are involved in the process.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments further, please contact Abja Midha at (212) 822-9502 or amidha@advocatesforchildren.org.

Sincerely,



Abja Midha
Coalition Coordinator

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