

August 21, 2020

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

Dear Interim Commissioner Rosa, Vice Chancellor Brown, and Members of the Board of Regents:

We write on behalf of the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma to urge the New York State Education Department (SED) and Board of Regents to immediately extend COVID-19 exemptions to graduation requirements through August 2021 and to apply for assessment waivers from the U.S. Department of Education.

Our coalition of more than 80 individuals and organizations, including educators, advocates, and parents from across New York State, stood in strong support of your decision to exempt students from Regents exams, technical assessments, and other pathway assessments required for graduation during the 2019-20 school year. The emergency amendments to Sections 100.2 and 100.5, adopted by the Board of Regents in May 2020, gave students across New York State the confidence that, if they could engage in remote learning and demonstrate mastery of standards through their coursework, their graduation and post-secondary plans would not be derailed by this pandemic. What is more, these COVID-19 exemptions allowed high schools to focus on providing continuity of learning and to direct efforts toward local school and community needs, rather than focusing on high-stakes tests. As educators and families contemplate how to return to school in the fall, it is critical that SED and the Board of Regents take immediate action to extend these exemptions through the 2020-21 school year.

Immediately Extend COVID-19 Regents Exam Exemptions Through the 2020-21 School Year

We urge the Board of Regents to take emergency action at their September meeting to extend COVID-19 exemptions to graduation requirements through the 2020-21 school year, until August 2021. This pandemic will radically impact teaching and learning throughout the 2020-21 school year as many students, who have already experienced significant disruptions to their education, will continue learning remotely at least part of the time. During these challenging times, students and educators should be able to focus on maximizing remote or hybrid learning by prioritizing students' social-emotional needs and zeroing in on the key standards at each grade level that will prepare students for future success, rather than worrying about high-stakes tests. Exempting students from Regents exams and other high-stakes graduation assessments this year will reduce students' anxiety and will create opportunities for schools to utilize more innovative, meaningful and holistic assessments to measure student growth and mastery of State standards. We urge you to quickly take action to extend these exam exemptions now so that students and educators can begin the new school year with the assurance they need to a focus on preparing for students' future success rather than preparing for high-stakes tests.

Apply for ESSA Exam Waivers

Waiving exit exam requirements for graduation does not require federal approval, as ESSA does not mandate that states tether accountability assessments to graduation requirements. As you are aware, the vast majority of states do not require any exit exams for graduation. However, canceling the exams entirely does require a federal waiver. As such, we urge New York to join a growing list of states, including [Georgia](#), [Michigan](#) and [South Carolina](#), which have already indicated that they will be seeking federal waivers to high-stakes accountability assessments for the 2020-21

school year due to the ongoing pandemic. Parents, [New York City Council Members](#), and others have already urged cancelation of 2020-21 standardized assessments, including Regents exams, to allow schools to instead focus their limited resources on promoting health, safety, and social and emotional wellness, and on developing more innovative teaching and assessment strategies. We join them and call on SED and the Board of Regents to commit to applying for a waiver to all accountability assessments for the 2020-21 school year.

Please contact me with any questions or to discuss this recommendation further. We wish you health and safety and thank you for your leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Ashley Grant

Advocates for Children of New York • Alliance for Quality Education • ARISE Coalition • Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association • Big Picture Learning • David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center • Bronx Independent Living Services • Bronx Defenders • Brooklyn Defender Services • Brooklyn Center for the Disabled • Bonnie Buckley, Founder Multiple Pathways to a Diploma For All • 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 • Citywide Council on Special Education, NYC • Lisa Finnerty Coggi, Parent/Advocate • Community Service Society • Council for a Strong America • Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies • Valerie DeClara, Parent • Amber Decker, Family Peer Advocate, Special Support Services • Della DeKay JD, EdD • Max Donatelli, Family Advocate • Eskolta School Research and Design • Irja Estrella, Parent • Families Together in New York State • Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Parent • Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project • Jennifer Ghidiu, Parent/Advocate • Michael Godino, Advocate • Good Shepherd Services • Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate • Lorri Gumanow, Parent/Special Educator • Meghan Healy • HERE to HERE • Rochelle Hoot, Special Education Administrator • 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 • JobsFirst NYC • 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 • New York Council of Administrators of Special Education (NYCASE) • New York Immigration Coalition • New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation • 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 Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYTESOL) • NY Stop Grad HST • NYU Metro Center • 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 • South Bronx Rising Together • Starbridge • Katherine Teasdale-Edwards, School Counselor • Amy Ming Tsai, Parent/Advocate for Special Education • United We Stand • Unity Preparatory Charter School of Brooklyn • Christian Villenas, PhD • Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate • YOUTH POWER!
