



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For immediate release

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Response to the State Education Department's Proposal to Sunset Diploma Assessment Requirements

September 14, 2026 (NEW YORK CITY) — *Maria Odom, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement in response to the proposal approved this morning by the New York State Board of Regents for the State Education Department (SED) to take the necessary steps to move forward with sunseting diploma assessment requirements starting in the 2027–28 school year:*

We are pleased to see the New York State Education Department and Board of Regents advance their proposal to decouple Regents exams from graduation requirements. For many years, AFC has advocated for multiple pathways to a high school diploma—for a system that provides students with multiple ways to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. We fully support a change that recognizes the value of multiple measures of student learning and abandons the outdated idea that all young people must pass a set of high-stakes standardized tests in order to demonstrate their readiness for post-secondary life.

New York moved towards its current graduation framework in the late 1990s based on the theory that requiring all students to pass multiple exit exams would increase access to rigorous, high-quality instruction and improve achievement for students. Unfortunately, this theory does not hold water: we now know that there is *no* evidence that exit exams like the Regents increase student achievement, raise the value of a high school diploma in the labor market, or convey other benefits to students who pass them. Nor are they an impartial and reliable gauge of graduation-readiness; research has found that factors as arbitrary as the weather can significantly affect a student's performance. As the memo SED presented this morning rightly notes, “no...evidence exists to support using Regents examinations as a basis for the issuance of a high school diploma. Put simply, Regents examinations were not designed to measure graduation readiness.”

It is time for New York to follow the lead of dozens of other states and end its well-intentioned—but ultimately misguided—experiment with exit exams, which have caused significant harm to young people. Studies have found, for example, that exit exams can increase high school dropout rates, especially for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. At AFC, we have seen this harm firsthand; we have worked with students who overcame significant barriers to complete their coursework but were unable to earn a high school diploma because they struggled with

standardized assessments, sometimes sitting for a single exam a half-dozen times to try to raise their score by just a few points.

We look forward to working with SED and the Board of Regents to build out the initial proposal presented today and ensure that all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, get the support they need to graduate.

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.