



January 27, 2025

New York State Education Department &
New York State Board of Regents
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Re: NY Inspires

Dear Commissioner Rosa, Chancellor Young, and Members of the Board of Regents:

On behalf of the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma, we are writing to thank you for your work to develop and launch NY Inspires and to urge you to accelerate the timeline for adopting the plan and for sunsetting assessment requirements.

The Coalition has long advocated for the decoupling of Regents exams from high school graduation requirements and for all students to have access to multiple pathways by which they can demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and mastery of State standards. As such, we commend the State Education Department (SED) for proposing bold steps to transform New York's graduation framework in response to the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Exit exam policies like New York's have caused significant harm to young people while failing to achieve their intended aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning, and we are very pleased that SED included sunsetting assessment requirements as one of the four key transformations.

While a phased approach to full implementation of the four transformations is appropriate, we urge SED and the Regents to accelerate the timeline for approval and adoption of key actions necessary for such implementation. Districts need certainty to effectively plan for the rollout of changes as significant as those laid out in November, but prior to a formal vote by the Regents, they lack assurance that the State will not abruptly reverse course if present leadership turns over or the political climate shifts. We urge you to move forward with the adoption of key regulatory changes this year.

We also strongly recommend the *immediate* decoupling of Regents exams from graduation requirements, rather than waiting until fall 2027. Now that the Commission has completed its work and the State has decided on the path forward, there is no rationale for continuing to require high school students to pass five exams as a condition of earning a diploma. On the contrary, maintaining the status quo carries clear risks; research has found that exit exams can increase high school dropout rates, especially for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. New York is already out of step with the rest of the nation—there are just six other states that have exit exam requirements for the class of 2025. While other elements of the four transformations will require careful planning, stakeholder input, and professional learning opportunities, removing high-stakes assessments as a potential barrier to a diploma is a step the State can take today.



Finally, we urge SED to provide clarity as soon as possible regarding the process for determining whether a student qualifies for an exemption from the assessment requirement due to a “major life event.” The specifics of this policy could have profound consequences for individual young people.

Thank you for your commitment to creating a more equitable graduation framework that meets the needs of today’s students. We stand ready to work with you to ensure implementation is effective for all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. We would welcome the opportunity to engage in discussions and provide feedback as implementation of the four transformations moves forward.

Thank you!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randi Levine".

Randi Levine

Policy Director, Advocates for Children of New York

On behalf of the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma