

Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

Coordinator: Abja Midha • amidha@advocatesforchildren.org • 212-822-9502

May 20, 2015

BY EMAIL

Senior Deputy Commissioner Ken Wagner
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Re: Recommendations for Testing Reduction Report

Dear Mr. Wagner:

The Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma is writing in regards to the testing reduction report presentation at the Regents meeting earlier this week. We were disappointed to learn that the New York State Education Department is not planning to address potential changes to the high-stakes Regents exams as part of the testing reduction report that will be submitted to the Governor and Legislature on June 1. The Coalition urges you to revisit this decision and address modifications to the Regents exam requirements as part of the testing reduction report. For students who have mastered State standards, but are unable to demonstrate their knowledge on high-stakes standardized tests, the Regents exams are not only a source of stress and anxiety, but they also serve as an unnecessary barrier to high school graduation. With 24 percent of students failing to graduate within 4 years, there is an urgent need to revise exit exam requirements in New York State, while maintaining high standards and promoting college or career readiness.

Advocates for Children of New York • Alliance for Quality Education • Annenberg Institute for School Reform • ARISE Coalition • Jessica Bacon, Professor, Lehman College • Lynn Bass, Principal, Tapestry Charter High School • David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center • Brooklyn Defender Services • Bronx Independent Living Services • BronxWorks • Brooklyn Center for the Disabled • Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective • 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 • Council for a Strong America • Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies • Council of New York Special Education Administrators • Valerie DeClara, Parent • Robert Dodd, New York City Special Education Teacher • Families Together in New York State • Ann Marie FitzPatrick, Parent • Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project • Good Shepherd Services • Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate • Holly Gurnick, Parent • Shelley Hubal, Parent • Jill Lewis-Flood, Parent • Meghan Healy • Internationals Network for Public Schools • Lawyers for Children, Inc. • Learning Disabilities Association of New York State • Long Island Advocacy Center • Long Island Communities of Practice • Noreen Maher, Parent • Diana Mendez, Parent • Mental Health Association of New York City • Neighborhood Family Services Coalition • New York Immigration Coalition • New York Lawyers for Public Interest • 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. • New York State Rehabilitation Association • New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages • Regina Paleau, Parent • Parent to Parent New York, Inc. • Queens Community House • Resources for Children with Special Needs • Lynn Russo, Parent • Tracey Shannon, Parent • Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center • The Advocacy Center • United We Stand • Upward Bound • Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools • Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate • YOUTH POWER!

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The Coalition urges you to consider including the following assessment options as part of the testing reduction report:

- **Reduce the number of exit exams required to graduate from 5 to 3.** As the Board of Regents has recognized, the federal government does not require students to pass exit exams in order to graduate from high school. In fact, only 24 states currently require students to pass exit exams to graduate. Of those states that require exit exams, New York State has some of the most onerous testing requirements.

We recommend that the State require only the English Regents, one Math Regents, and one Science Regents for graduation. Maintaining exam requirements in these subjects would give the State the flexibility to use these assessments to comply with federal testing requirements. All other Regents exams would remain optional and available for students who choose to take them in order to graduate with a Regents Diploma with Honors or Advanced Regents Diploma. The number, types, and sequence of credits required to graduate would not be affected. Students still would have to fulfill the same course requirements to receive a high school diploma.

- **Develop performance-based assessments.** In lieu of each Regents exam, students should be allowed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through State-developed and/or approved performance-based assessments, completing a series of tasks/projects in contexts that are familiar and relevant to their high school experiences. We recommend that the State review the experiences of Maryland, Washington and New Jersey, all of which have provided students with performance-based options in lieu of standardized tests.
- **Build more flexibility into the current system.** We encourage the State to expand access to the already-existing appeals process. The current appeals criteria are extremely onerous and nearly impossible to meet. Students should be allowed to appeal their scores on all of the Regents exams and should be permitted to appeal scores lower than 62. In addition, the attendance requirement for appeals should be modified so that students are not held to the unrealistic 95 percent attendance rate requirement. We encourage the State to examine the experiences of other states, which offer a variety of appeals options. In particular, we highlight the experience of Maryland, which offers a combined score option, where the student must earn a designated combined score for all of the required exit exams, even if the student does not pass each individual exam.

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We outline the above recommendations in greater detail in our report, *Rethinking Pathways to High School Graduation in New York State: Forging New Ways for Students to Show Their Achievement of Standards*, which can be found [here](#).

Thank you for taking our recommendations into consideration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues further, you can reach me at 212-822-9502.

Sincerely,



Abja Midha
Coalition Coordinator

cc:	Chancellor Tisch	Vice Chancellor Bottar	Regent Tallon
	Regent Tilles	Regent Bendit	Regent Rosa
	Regent Cea	Regent Finn	Regent Young
	Regent Cottrell	Regent Brown	Regent Norwood
	Regent Johnson	Regent Collins	Regent Chin
			Regent Ouderkirk
			Commissioner Berlin