

Testimony for the New York Education Reform Commission  
October 2012

Good morning. My name is Beata Moon. I am a pianist and composer, teaching artist and parent of a four-year-old who just started Pre-K. For the past fifteen years, I have worked in the schools with teachers, administrators, and students of all age levels ranging from Kindergarten to adult in all of NYC, parts of Long Island and Westchester as a music teaching artist for Lincoln Center Institute. Currently, through Carnegie Hall, I am also working as a music facilitator for Arts Achieve, which is a federally-funded pilot program aimed to elevate the level of arts instruction in the schools as well as to take a look at assessment in the arts.

I would like to ask each and every one of you to please take a moment and think back to when you were a child in school, when your mind was lit on fire with curiosity, when you were excited to learn something, when you felt proud and validated to be in school. What were the circumstances surrounding these moments? What or who inspired you - a teacher, administrator, classmate...?

How can we bring back this love of learning, this thirst for knowledge, into the classrooms? How can we foster curiosity and critical thinking in our students? What is needed to provide a safe learning environment for all our students no matter where they are from, what neighborhood they live in or what school they attend?

As a parent and an educator, I am concerned about how my son will experience school in the coming years. Rather than being an inviting place for learning and discovery, school has become a pressure-cooker to produce high test scores, with a narrow assessment on what intelligence really is.

Before you make any recommendations to the Governor, I urge you to consider the following:

- Please spend more quality time in the schools, observing the classrooms, if you haven't done so already. There is too much of a disconnect between the policy makers and those who work within the everyday realities of the school environment. You cannot substitute first-hand experiences in the actual school environments with second-hand testimonies.
- If you want to generate creative thinkers, then don't run a school like a business. Children's growing, evolving minds are not products that can be easily assessed. Their teachers, who form important relationships with these children, need to be supported and respected. The complexity and richness of true learning (not just memorizing facts) is inherently tied into the human relationships and connections made between teachers and students, and this cannot be easily evaluated nor treated with a one-size fits all solution.
- Class size really does matter. If you go into the classrooms, you will understand immediately. And please, especially protect the young learners just starting school. To suddenly be in a large group with only one teacher who cannot be attentive to everyone could sour their early school experiences.
- Yes, all of us - students, teachers, administration, parents – everyone in this room needs continual reflection and *formative* assessment, which is the ongoing process of looking at where we are and how we can improve ourselves. The overemphasis on high-stakes testing, which is *not* formative but summative assessment, is not putting students first. It is difficult to avoid teaching and studying only to the test when the results are given such prominence.

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I hope you will reflect on your personal childhood school memories and think about the circumstances that made you want to learn. Please put yourselves in the shoes of the parents, teachers, principals, and students who will have to deal with how your policy recommendations might affect them.

Thank you.