

Statement by:

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Teacher and Principal Quality and District Leadership Panel

Long Island Region Public Hearing of the New NY Education Reform Commission

Place and time:

SUNY College at Old Westbury, Student Union Building, Old Westbury, NY 11568

Thursday, October 11, 2012, 10am - 1pm

Statement:

The Commission aims to examine factors in quality teaching and leading that will improve student learning and raise student achievement. If the commission intends to accomplish those goals, it is imperative to (1) acknowledge that the creation of many of its current mandates run counter to research on student learning, teacher learning, and leadership development, and (2) adopt a frame of reference and policies consistent with research on student learning, teacher learning, and leadership development.

You want solution oriented input—here is a 6 point plan.

1. Follow the research.

There is no shred of credible research conducted by any group other than the companies developing and investing in current test instruments that suggest it is valid to assess school and teacher quality thru students' test scores. Educators know this. Thus, **eliminate student scores from APPR and replace the 40% with credible evidence of student change linked to course-specific performance-based assessments that gauge the skills and abilities students will need upon graduation** – such as creative and critical thinking, the ability to identify and solve complex, non-standard problems, and the capacity to work collaboratively with others in pursuit of answers to these problems. Anecdote: Just last week, the mother of a 10th grade alternative high school student, constantly truant, called in to report he was ill and would miss school that day. When the principal reminded his mom that the student would miss his lab-based interactive STEM program, he quickly began to feel better and got his mom to drive him to school. This is how you measure the value of an educational program. You go, and you look and you see the nature of the educational program, the human interactions within them, the motivation students develop to learn through them, and the nature of student development and learning within them.

2. Fix the current model's faulty math.

The current structure of APPR that includes a value added component is statistically inaccurate. Most egregious is the use of value added models for causal inferences, such as implying that one teacher caused an increase in a particular student's test scores on a state test in a given year ... or another teacher prevented an increase in that same year. Consult the *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, one among many journals, for countless articles describing why value-added models simply cannot isolate practice at the classroom level from other factors, for example, demographics, previous life experience, social interactions, and a host of socio-economic factors. Value-added models look at student test scores from grade to grade and use some measure of test score gain as an indicator of growth. But, what is taught and tested varies widely within and across grade levels, so purported value-added analyses, by definition of the measure, have no broadly applicable meaning. The failure of the State Education Department to recognize that the value-added model disadvantages teachers of higher performing students who have less "room to grow." Their teachers are more likely to be rated as having added less value. Is it any wonder that educators are cynical about the state's model? **Stop racing to the top and adopt a teacher evaluation model supported by solid statistical, and, as the common core suggests, *non-fictional* text.**

3. Focus on student learning, not student achievement.

Achievement historically is related to test scores, and there is more and more research pointing to the pursuit of higher test scores interfering with the pursuit of real learning. In the US, as state test scores have risen steadily over the past several years, scores on other measures of student achievement – PISA, TIMSS, SAT, ACT and NAEP – have remained flat and in some cases have even dropped. Why? Because the focus on scoring well on state tests results bring about just that – higher scores on state tests ... with no real improvement in anything else. The very nations we purport to admire because of their students' scores on international assessments eschew state and national tests for this very reason. **Require schools and districts to develop their own plans to document student changes, and focus on shifts in conceptual and skill-based outcomes. Re-institute the State Education Department's School Quality Review process, or some other process that requires districts to become involved in some form of regularly-scheduled external peer review. It is through these rich analyses that school quality and student learning will improve.**

4. Invest in teacher learning and leadership development.

When educators from Finland and Singapore and Shanghai, and all of the other countries the US claims to admire on international assessment measures, talk about their educational systems they point first to their investments in the professional learning of their educators. If we would stop pumping millions of dollars into the development of tests and the related curriculum materials that accompany them, there would be lots of money to use on teacher and administrator development, which would be placing the funds closest to the students. The research is clear: no factor, not curriculum or programs or structures, is more closely related to student learning than the quality of the teachers with whom they learn each and every day and the vision and knowledge base of the administrators with whom they work. **Let's invest in what the research says really matters.**

5. Engage educators' voices.

One reason proposed reforms rarely gain traction is that educators know that they are doomed to fail because they run counter to what we know about, and what the research says about, how human beings learn. The reform efforts are driven by people in the political and business worlds who respond to non-educational agendas and base policy decisions on their own logic, without any real understanding of human development, student learning, or how organizational change occurs. What are educators to make of a Governor's commission on education that initially did not have a single educator on it? **Get educators' voices into the discussion on how to improve schools – we know how to speak on behalf of children.**

6. Reduce testing

Anecdotally and through research we know that we are over-testing and, compared to the cost of testing (both in terms of time and money), getting relatively little useful information back. We also know that teachers and administrators are narrowing the curriculum to match what is tested. Teachers are letting the many opportunities for real learning, which emerge in the classroom from student questions and interactions, quietly slip away in order to cover the material that will be tested. Schooling has become a less rich, less deep, less rigorous experience for students -- even as test scores may rise. What to do: **Reduce testing and increase student and teacher capacity to document learning in performance based student work, such as authentic interdisciplinary projects, portfolios, demonstrations and exhibitions. Establish definitions of and thresholds for success.**