

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding reforms aimed at improving New York State's Public Education System. As a product of that educational system, and a professional who has dedicated his professional life to teaching students, and working with students, teachers, and parents as a school administrator, I have a unique perspective of our educational system, at least our educational system on Long Island.

I would like to focus my comments (testimony) on two areas, first, student achievement and the use of testing and data to evaluate student achievement and, second, teacher and principal quality and district leadership, specifically as they apply to the new APPR accountability systems.

Currently, New York State's grades 3-8 testing program is seriously flawed. Using flawed and poorly prepared tests to evaluate students, teachers, and principals is a mistake and one that needs to be undone as soon as possible. I understand the commission is looking for solution oriented input, and with that in mind, I would like to suggest a shift away from the current testing program. We have introduced the new common core curriculum and there is an emphasis on student performance, and inquiry based instruction. In our rush to build the plane while in flight we are causing harm to our students. What I suggest is we suspend the current testing program and take the appropriate time that is required to develop a testing program which contains high quality items and which allows for students to demonstrate mastery through performance rather than by answering multiple choice and short answer questions. We are asking our teachers to change the way they teach, to be more creative in their classrooms and design inquiry based lessons that facilitate students thinking and engaging with the curriculum on deeper more meaningful levels, our testing program should ask for our students to demonstrate those same skills. I suggest we take the money that is being spent this year and next to create these tests and redirect this money to create exams that are more reflective of the new common core curriculum, if in fact we need to administer these exams at all. Using data to help drive instruction can be a very positive tool in the classroom and teachers should be more proficient in doing so but judging the success and failure of our teachers and administrators based upon test results is a mistake.

I don't think a "one size fits all" approach to education is a good idea at all. In fact I don't think that it is even possible. New York State should not punish school districts that are having difficulty performing, because in those communities, there are larger problems, problems that ELA exams and Math exams can't ever measure. There is something fundamentally broken in those communities. When families are involved and engaged in their children's education, the results speak for themselves. We need to support the families in our struggling communities if we ever hope to fix the educational systems. This isn't just a matter of educational reform its social reform.

On the subject of assessing teacher and principal quality in our schools, I believe that this can and should be done without being made public and additionally, given the current testing system and the seriously flawed statistical tools being used to measure "student growth", NYS test results should not be a factor in those assessments. I suggest that our educational leaders in Albany seek real, honest and genuine input from those of us who have dedicated our lives to teaching and educating the students of this great State. Let's stop worrying about election cycles and start worrying about our students again.

I would like to thank you for your service on this important committee. I appreciate the opportunity to share a few of my thoughts and ideas regarding the education of our students on Long Island and I hope you have the opportunity to visit some of the many fine school districts that Long Island has to offer at some point in your travels.

Sincerely,

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