

**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education
on the Impact of Standardized Testing on Students in New York City**

Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

November 25, 2013

Testimony of Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott

Good morning Chair Jackson and Members of the Education Committee. I am Dennis Walcott, Chancellor of New York City Schools and I am pleased to be joined this morning by Simone D'Souza, the Executive Director of the Office of Research, Accountability, & Data.

After years of appearances before your committee, I will testify before you for the last time today. I have deeply appreciated your tireless work to ensure that students and families receive the highest-quality education possible, and I am extremely proud of the progress I can share with you this morning.

I am here to address the topic of today's hearing, which is the impact of standardized testing on students. The conversation about how to best assess performance is taking place across the country as the global economy is demanding more from our graduates. Today's students must be prepared to compete, not just in school, but in jobs and in life. Tough academic standards that require students to think critically and creatively are the only way they can be prepared to succeed, and our City—and country—can out-compete the rest of the world.

That is why this administration was one of the first in the country to identify college and career readiness as a goal. We implemented programs to improve the college readiness among our students, developed a relationship with the City University of New York, and set benchmarks for achieving it.

It is why we re-focused our instruction toward a higher baseline and started arming schools with information on students' performance at their next academic institution.

It is why we were one of the first urban districts in the country to objectively measure student, teacher, and school performance. It is what has transformed the educational landscape of this City and is one of the primary reasons why record numbers of students are graduating today prepared for future success.

We celebrate these accomplishments, but we know that more work lies ahead if our students are to compete in the 21st century economy.



According to research by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, over the course of this decade there will be 3.3 million job openings in New York State alone, the vast majority of which will require a college education or higher.

In fact, only 8 percent of those new jobs will be open to candidates without a high school diploma. In order to prepare our students to compete, it is imperative that we raise the bar and fine-tune our rigorous assessments.

There is no question that the experience of test taking is stressful and change does not come without growing pains. However, tests *do* give us a sense of what students know and where they need to improve.

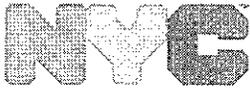
When the State test results were released last summer, there was an understandable reaction to test scores that reflected the new Common Core standards—a consequence we knew would be an inherent part of raising standards and moving forward.

We made widespread efforts to prepare school communities with presentations about the new tests in every borough, posting public service announcements in 40 percent of our subway cars, and sharing public videos and webinars, which were viewed thousands of times. We wanted educators and families to regard these tougher standards with an eye toward the future: to prepare students for a life of success tomorrow. It is imperative that our students receive adequate preparation for that future—today.

There are clear signs of progress. The City's students out-performed students in every other major city in New York by leaps and bounds. In math, 29.6 percent of New York City students were proficient, compared to 14.5 percent in Yonkers, 9.6 percent in Buffalo, 6.9 percent in Syracuse, and 5.0 percent in Rochester. In ELA, 26.4 percent of New York City students were proficient, compared to 16.4 percent in Yonkers, 11.5 percent in Buffalo, 8.7 percent in Syracuse, and 5.4 percent in Rochester.

It is true that no single test can capture the full range of knowledge and skills our students are learning in the classroom each day. However, assessment provides feedback, which in turn leads to more effective instruction. Our emphasis, attention, and resources must always return to instruction. That is why we have invested more than \$175 million over the past three years to support teachers, and we will continue to invest in teachers.

Tests also provide important data for our annual Progress Reports. Progress Reports hold schools accountable, and have been an invaluable tool since we introduced them in 2006: both by helping families choose the best school for their children and to reveal what is and what is not working in our classrooms. We are continuously fine-tuning our accountability system. The high school report, for example, now includes measures of college and career readiness, while the middle school report includes students' results in core academic courses.



**Department of
Education**

We share your concern about the progress of English language learners, which is why we have invested more than \$80 million over the last two years directly to schools to provide them additional support. We have also created more professional development opportunities for educators who work with students with disabilities. Since the citywide roll-out of the special education reform in September 2012, more than 50,000 general and special educators, paraprofessionals, and school leaders have taken advantage of these trainings.

This summer's test data also revealed that our City's teachers had been more successful than their colleagues across the state in shifting their instruction to align with the new standards. This summer, State growth scores—formal measures of how much students improved over last school year—revealed that New York City had twice as many highly effective teachers and almost half the number of ineffective teachers as the rest of New York State.

This is only part of the historic progress New York City's school system has achieved over the past decade. Since 2005, the percentage of students who are graduating from high school ready for college or a career has doubled; at the same time, the dropout rate has been cut in half.

This year, as our school communities have had to deal with a multitude of challenges, the Department of Education has intensified our focus on communicating with schools, families, and the public. Since fall 2012, we have renewed efforts to share information about the Common Core standards and the new State tests by sending resources to principals, backpacking a letter home to families, redesigning the Common Core Library, leading interactive webinars, and giving dozens of public presentations across all districts of the City.

We must ensure that parents are aware of these changes and how their children are affected. That is why the Department of Education, as part of a collaboration with the United Federation of Teachers, the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators, and the Coalition for Educational Justice, has invested \$5 million to establish extended parent-teacher conversations. All elementary and middle schools have been asked to meet with families of students who scored below a Level 3 on the new State tests. An extended conversation of up to 30 minutes will go a long way to support a student's progress. Our work is about supporting students' development and ensuring that they have options when they graduate from high school.

Last week, the Department of Education released a policy brief that summarizes the evolution of the accountability system, shares current initiatives, and lists possibilities for moving forward. For example, Simone's team is identifying ways to incorporate additional measures into school accountability including measures of academic attitudes and behaviors, and tailor accountability reports to our various audiences.

In addition, this fall the Department of Education launched the Accountability Measures Pilot, which allows select network teams to work with their schools to develop accountability measures other than State tests that are the best fit for them; for instance, student work or course grades.



To ease the pressure on students and educators, the Department of Education is appealing to the New York State Education Department to create more flexibility for schools. For example, because of the structure of the new teacher evaluation and development system, 36 early childhood schools with grades K-2 have been required to administer bubble tests in math. Both the Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers found this requirement developmentally inappropriate and earlier this month, I sent a letter to Commissioner John B. King Jr., to request more options for this subset of schools.

The changes we are implementing right now are extremely important. While the new tests have helped us achieve a higher standard for our students, they also tell us that we have more work to do. With time and support, I am confident that we will all rise to the challenge. We must continue to focus on rigorous instruction and higher-quality tests to support the deeper learning our students need to achieve futures they deserve: to graduate high school, attend college, thrive in a career, and earn wages that would allow them to support a family.

A slew of independent studies this fall have reached a strikingly similar conclusion: This Mayoral administration has achieved a historic turnaround of a school system many had all but given up on a decade ago. It is now up to the next administration to build on our progress.

Finally, being honest about academic achievement—both its strength and weaknesses—is the best legacy we could leave our students.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify. It has been a pleasure work with all of you during my tenure. I can now take your questions.

TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

REGARDING THE IMPACT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING
ON STUDENTS

NOVEMBER 25, 2013

Good afternoon. My name is Richard Mantell and I am the vice president for junior high and intermediate schools for the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of our 200,000 members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

The rapid proliferation of standardized tests in our schools has had a deleterious effect on our children. Meaningful teaching and learning has too often been replaced by mindless test prep – an unproductive exercise that teachers derisively call “drill and kill”. While the Bloomberg administration and so-called education ‘reformers’ promote testing and test-prep as the end-all and be-all to ensure accountability, the real effect is that weeks of valuable classroom instruction time are lost every year.

Compounding the problem is that tests have become high-stakes. Standardized test results now determine everything from whether or not a student moves to the next grade to the level of funding that schools receive. The scores also factor into a portion of evaluations for administrators and teachers. Our children and our teachers cannot be reduced to a test score.

The testing craze has gotten so completely out of hand that we’re now seeing students in kindergarten, first and second grade forced to take exams with bubble-in answer sheets. We all know that this is developmentally inappropriate. Students in the primary grades often lack the manual dexterity or other test-taking skills necessary for such an exam. Just think about it for a moment – kindergarteners who haven’t even begun to transition from those big thick crayons to holding a pencil or who haven’t yet learned how to stay within the lines on a drawing are being asked to sit still and take fill-in-the-circle tests. The NYC Department of Education and the state Education Department both deny ownership on that initiative, but the fact remains that it’s going on in dozens of schools.

For the so-called ‘reformers’ obsessed with testing, only data matters: it’s all about producing numbers in the name of accountability and the result is a one-size-fits-all approach to education. Forget the totality of a student’s portfolio of work over the course of a year, and forget too whether or not the student had a bad day or doesn’t test well. That stuff just doesn’t compute.

More and more, however, the flaws in that failed strategy are coming to light. The most notable example was the precipitous drop in test scores earlier this year once standards were raised. What those test scores revealed, of course, was that prepping for a test does not work. All it does is prepare students for a test, not for deeper critical thinking. It wasn’t enough for the Bloomberg administration or the State Education Department to make a mad scramble at managing expectations about the test scores. What they should have done is held a real dialogue with parents to properly explain the scores. More than that, they should have put supports in place to address the needs of the lowest-scoring children.

But the state and the Bloomberg administration failed to do either and as a result the high-stakes tests are now threatening the future of the higher standards that we're trying to achieve in our classrooms. One need only look at the video from Poughkeepsie, or listen to the news reports out of Long Island, or talk to teachers in our own city to know that high standards are under threat because of high stakes have been attached to them.

Parents worry about the pressure on their children who suddenly feel like failures. Teachers are pressured to produce better results without a curriculum. And children bear the brunt. The standards are not the real problem, it's the high stakes that are attached to them. Regardless of what one thinks of the Common Core standards, higher standards are vitally important for our students, and we do them great harm if we fail to ask them to reach high. But how can you raise standards when the short-term bottom line, test scores, has come to define who our children are?

The expansion of testing has also become a lucrative venture for the big companies that make millions of dollars developing and printing the exams. Those multimillion dollar contracts have unfortunately come hand-in-hand with a long list of well-documented problems, including tests with nonsensical questions or wrong answers and inaccurate scoring. Many tests that schools used were off-the-shelf products that had students only solve single-step problems or repeat writing passages rather than do any analysis or performance tasks.

It's small wonder that the backlash against the so-called 'reformers' continues to grow, as more and more teachers and parents are revolting against the misguided testing craze by rallying in the streets and having their children boycott the tests. A Siena College poll just last week showed that more than half of New Yorkers now believe there is too much testing in schools.

The backlash has also finally motivated the DOE to begin rethinking its own failed strategies. In a forum on accountability hosted by the CUNY Institute for Education Policy, a DOE official was forced to acknowledge that the department's obsession with test scores has stifled creativity, stalled new programs and caused schools to narrow their curriculum and instead prioritize test prep. The DOE's acknowledgement is a good first step, but there's a lot of work ahead to undo years of bad policies.

MORATORIUM ON USING STANDARDIZED TESTS FOR HIGH STAKES

The UFT's highest representative body, the 3,400-member Delegate Assembly, has passed two major resolutions in recent weeks to address some of the major testing issues facing our schools.

The first resolution is a moratorium on attaching consequences to standardized tests. Since our union's founding more than 53 years ago, the UFT has remained committed to ensuring that teachers have the ability to help every child achieve, which includes making sure they get the materials, training and support they need. But some teachers have still not received curriculum or training for teaching the Common Core standards. It's unfair and unacceptable for teachers to be judged on tests for which they cannot properly prepare their students because they lack the necessary curriculum resources, student reading materials and training.

Our resolution states that "attaching high-stakes consequences to the new state exams at this time would be reckless and damaging to our public schools in light of the failure of the city to ensure that schools and teachers received adequate resources and professional development prior to the start of this school year". We have therefore called for the moratorium "until representatives of all interested parties — including parents and educators — have worked with members of Congress, the state Legislature, the state

Commissioner of Education, the Board of Regents and the New York City Panel for Educational Policy to carefully examine how well the new curricula, professional development and tests align to the Common Core standards”.

The moratorium is both prudent and reasonable in light of the huge problems the DOE and SED have had in rolling out the new standards and curriculum.

BAN ON STANDARDIZED TESTS FOR STUDENTS PRE-K TO SECOND GRADE

The UFT, along with parents and the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) have also called for the ban of standardized testing for children in 2nd grade and younger. We believe these tests not only take away valuable time that should be used for teaching and learning, but also put at risk children’s love of learning at an age when they are just starting their classroom experience. As we all know, negative school experiences can stay with us for a lifetime.

What can bubble tests possibly capture about what young children know and can do? Every 5-year-old is developmentally unique. Informal assessments that tell parents and teachers where they are at a given moment are great. They help us move kids forward. But how do we pass final judgment on whether students are above, below, or at some arbitrary standard of what it means to be 5? How many bubbles make a 5-year-old “just right”? We need more than test scores to understand the developmental levels, needs and strengths of 5-year olds.

Bubble tests don’t accomplish anything at a young age, certainly nothing remotely close to helping to develop cognitive thinking or problem-solving skills. Teachers have other ways of establishing student baselines. Teachers have always assessed K-2 students for purposes of instruction and promotion, but never using standardized tests. New Yorkers understand all this, and that’s why more than 10,000 people have signed our online petition in a week’s time, with hundreds more signatures pouring in every day. The ban is just common sense.

USING TESTS AS THEY ARE INTENDED – AS TOOLS

Teachers have been giving tests forever to assess students, and rightfully so. When they’re used correctly, a quiz here or an essay exam there, tests can be an important diagnostic tool for a teacher designing an educational plan for his or her students. “Tool” is the key word.

Since each student is unique, teachers differentiate instruction. Tests can be a useful tool for this by helping teachers determine whether students are ready to move onto new material or whether they need academic intervention or added scaffolding. Teachers can also use test results to make adjustments to their own approaches and presentation of content. Students, meanwhile, can use tests as safe avenues for exploring the depth of their knowledge and for practicing their skills.

In other words, testing can be used in a positive and beneficial way to enhance a student’s education. Testing does not have to be a high-stakes ‘gotcha’ game in which children, teachers or school communities face the potential of being labeled as failures.

Sadly, we’ve gotten away from a commonsense approach to testing thanks to a single-minded DOE that has repeatedly and willfully ignored the research and advice of experts and educators alike. Testing now is all about “accountability,” not real learning. That mentality is wrong, and it’s harming our students.

The UFT stands with parents, advocates and elected officials who are taking a stand against high-stakes testing. After 10 years of increased standardized testing, the achievement gap is the same. The testing strategy is not working. Now with the rollout of the Common Core standards, we need students and teachers to feel positive and invested in their schools, not stressed and afraid of being labeled or set up to fail. It's time to end the excessive use of standardized tests and allow teachers to focus on what really matters: teaching in a comprehensive and holistic way for students to develop the critical thinking skills they need to grow and succeed in life.

To that end we support Proposed Resolution Number 1394 calling for the "New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to reexamine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing." We thank Councilmembers Jackson and Brewer for their leadership on this issue.

As it relates to Proposed Introduction Number 925, the UFT is strongly committed to arts education in our public schools and we believe that the reporting called for in this proposed legislation will shed important light on the availability of arts instruction and student completion of arts requirements. We support the proposed legislation and thank Councilmember Jackson and the other sponsors for their leadership on this issue.

Finally, as it relates to Proposed Introduction Number 1091 requiring the DOE to provide information to all student families about college savings plans, we think this would greatly serve families and students in preparing for college. We support the proposed resolution and thank Councilmember King and the other sponsors for their leadership on this issue.

- Thank you.

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THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION®

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

RE: Intro 925-2012:

A Local Law to amend the New York city charter, in relation to requiring the département of education to provide data regarding the provision of arts instructional requirements.

Delivered by Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy
The Center for Arts Education
November 25, 2013

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Introduction 925 in relation to the establishment of reporting requirements for arts education, as well as the impact of standardized testing in public schools and the city and state school accountability system.

I will direct my comments primarily to Intro 925, although I will also share thoughts on the other two items, and would like to note that, in many ways these three issues have become intricately linked.

To begin, I would like to thank Councilmember Jackson for introducing Intro 925 and to all of the co-sponsors on this important legislation. The Center for Arts Education supports legislation aimed at requiring detailed reporting on the provision of the instructional requirements for the arts in city public schools.

We believe transparency in terms of school-based arts education provides parents, students and education decision-makers with much needed information about what instruction is being offered in schools and can drive improvements in public education. Ease of access to this type of information could help parents become informed advocates for the arts in their child's school, make critical decisions about where to send their children, and provide a map that the public and private sector could use to target resources and efforts to close the educational opportunity gaps that exist in public schools.

It is important to note that some of the data requested in this legislation is already being collected through annual surveys of school principals. Therefore, passage of this bill would not necessarily add a new reporting requirement for individual schools. However, requiring this type of reporting through local law will help ensure that this information is readily available each year, and importantly provided in a more useful and transparent manner.

According to the Department of Education's reporting we know that almost half of our public elementary schools are not currently providing the arts instruction that is outlined in state education

law and 22 percent of middle schools are not offering the coursework required for students to properly fulfill their arts credit requirement.

However, it is currently nearly impossible for the public, elected officials and education decision-makers to access a list of those schools that are not providing the minimum requirements. Intro 925 would help make this key information more widely available and accessible.

It is worth noting though, that while we support the direction of Intro 925, we believe it can be strengthened in two key ways to more accurately and efficiently capture the key data regarding the provision of instructional arts requirements in schools.

1-We feel strongly the legislation should also require reporting for the elementary school level.

Currently, the bill is limited to 6-12th grade. Providing information at the elementary level is equally as important and worthy of inclusion in this important bill.

2-We also believe the reporting requirements could be streamlined in other areas yet still provide the key information on school compliance with state arts education requirements. For instance, while there may be some value in reporting on students that met only a portion of the requirements at each grade level, this requirement could be burdensome on public schools, confusing to the public, and obfuscate the important bottom line data of what percentage of students are getting the required coursework in the overall time frame permitted. For instance, a student could have met “less than fifty percent” in the seventh grade, yet still be on track to fulfill the state requirements by taking two courses of the arts in the eighth grade.¹ This is compatible with state requirements and necessary to provide schools and students with scheduling flexibility.

We have previously provided a memo to Councilmember Jackson’s office that outlines these suggestions in more detail which we will re-forward after this meeting. We are happy to discuss further at your convenience.

Standardized Testing and School Accountability

Now, I’d like to take a moment to also comment on standardized testing and school accountability.

It has been The Center for Arts Education’s position since the introduction of school progress reports and the advent of the school accountability system that the reports do not paint a broad enough picture of the education a school is delivering, and that the focus and rewards and consequences built into the school accountability system has played a role in the marginalization of the arts, and other subjects, in many schools across the city.

In fact, at a forum last week, and as reported in GothamSchools, DOE Chief Academic Officer, Shael Polakow-Suransky admitted as much when he said

“If you have weak exams and if they send a signal to teachers that all you need focus on is the basic skills, then what you get is a narrowed curriculum,” he said. “And in the weakest classrooms, in the weakest schools, you get a focus on drilling to get to achievements just on those exams, which actually ignores the broader needs of students and often leads to a situation where kids are disengaged and aren’t actually learning the things that they need.”

We agree with Mr. Suransky’s analysis and know from experience and research that the arts provide a great tool to engage students in school and their education, particularly for struggling students and students at risk of dropping out.

We have previously made the case to the City Council, the Chancellor, the Board of Regents, and anyone that would listen that the progress reports and the accountability system should take into account a broader array of metrics that more accurately reflect the key components of a quality K-12 education that our schools are providing. For these reasons we support Resolution 1394.

We also believe that the data that is proposed to be collected through Intro 925 could be the exact type information that could be included in the school progress reports or perhaps in the state reporting and accountability systems to expand their scope and better reflect what we believe our schools should be providing to students to prepare them for college and career.

Finally, in conclusion, we believe transparency and reporting on arts education serves an important educational purpose by providing useful information that could help focus resources and efforts to close the educational opportunity gap. We also believe that the inclusion of the arts, and other core subject areas, in the school *Progress Reports* would send a clear message to parents, principals, and school communities that the City understands that these subject areas are essential to the education and health and well-being of our schoolchildren and would provide critical information for the public and parents about their public schools and their child’s education.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

ⁱ Students at the middle school level have two years to complete their arts coursework and at the high school level they have four years to complete the two arts courses required for graduation.



Testimony of

Moira Flavin

Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education, and Youth Services
Citizens' Committee for Children

*Oversight: Standardized Testing
and Regarding:
Resolution # 1394
Introduction #925
Introduction #1091*

Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
November 25, 2013

Good morning. My name is Moira Flavin and I am the Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education, and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 70-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Jackson, as well as the members of the Education Committee, for holding today's oversight hearing on the impact of standardized testing on DOE students, a related resolution, as well as Council bills aimed at ensuring arts education and ensuring families know how to open college savings accounts.

We appreciate the City Council's continuous efforts and oversight of the City's public school system. We believe that we have made significant progress, but that there is much more work to be done. Closer examination of standardized testing and art instruction is critical to ensuring children have a well-rounded education that will prepare them for college and beyond. Similarly, ensuring families have the information they need to begin saving for a college education will ensure more NYC public school children attend college, both because of the savings they accumulate and the college-bound identity these savings have been proven to create for the children.

Standardized Testing and Res. No. 1394, which calls on the New York State Education Department, the State Legislature and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require high-stakes testing.

High stakes testing currently plays a very large role at all levels of the school system. Children, teachers, and schools are all ranked based on these tests scores. Therefore, there are serious implications to them. Notably, test scores inform school accountability in New York City, accounting for 85% of the DOE's school progress reports when adding the student progress and performance components. Despite the DOE's efforts to control for differences in student demographics by comparing schools to those serving similar students, several analyses have shown that the methodology fails to completely account for variations in student populations.¹ As such, schools with large numbers of disadvantaged students tend to score lower on the progress reports. Unfortunately, as a result, standardized tests impact schools' acceptance of and approach to low-performing students, and their programmatic decisions to support these students.

CCC believes that all students in New York State deserve a quality education that inspires in them a love of learning and ultimately prepares them for college and careers. We recognize that standardized tests play a role in our education system, as it is important to have quality metrics with which to measure and compare students. We are concerned, however, that the growing emphasis on high-stakes standardized tests may detract from other subjects and skill development. Further, we are troubled by the ongoing gap in achievement on standardized tests for math and reading for students of color, economically

¹See 2012 report by the New York City Independent Budget Office, *Assessing School Progress Reports' Measures of Academic Achievement*. <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/schoolprogressreports2012.pdf> and New Visions for Public Schools' 2013 report *Unlocking New York City's High School Progress Report*. http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/aaa5/Unlocking_NYCs_High_School_Progress_Report_Corcoran_Pai.pdf <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/highschoolreport.pdf>

disadvantaged students, students in special education, and English language learners.² High-stakes standardized tests force teachers and principals to make difficult decisions about which students to accept, which support programs to develop, and how to focus instructional time. We urge the City and State to take a balanced approach to using standardized tests and other means of assessing students, such that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

CCC is encouraged by discussions about alternatives to high-stakes testing taking place at the City and State levels. There are several examples of schools and programs using measures other than standardized test scores to evaluate students. Two such examples are career and technical education programs and the New York Performance Standards Consortium. CCC encourages the State Education Department and the City DOE to continue looking closely at these models and expand them to ensure more students have access to a variety of quality academic programs.

The New York State Board of Regents is exploring a Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway³, and the New York City DOE has opened 28 new CTE schools since 2003.⁴ If done well, CCC believes that Career and Technical Education is a promising approach for students and could allow them the option to demonstrate competencies without high-stakes standardized testing. CCC urges City and State leaders to ensure that all students have access to quality CTE programs and that these programs lead to a regular high school diploma and adequately prepare students for college and career.

The New York Performance Standards Consortium is another example of how schools might use alternatives to high-stakes testing to assess student outcomes. The Consortium is made up of 28 member schools that use performance-based assessments to evaluate students. Students are required to complete academic tasks to demonstrate college and career readiness. Both students and educators have a role in developing the tasks, and teachers and external evaluators rate students using rubrics. According to the 2012 *Educating for the 21st Century* report, the Consortium schools have much higher graduation rates overall compared to New York City high schools, and higher rates for specific student populations, including students of color, ELLs and students with special needs. Graduates from these schools also rank higher on college and career readiness metrics, such as college acceptance and persistence.⁵

Though there is disagreement about how much can be known about student knowledge and growth from standardized tests, there is general agreement that tests do allow for some basic comparisons among students. While not the only metric in assessing student learning, standardized tests can and should be used as one tool to inform instruction and help school leaders identify and direct resources to struggling students. The fact that students struggle on standardized tests should lead educators to assess their needs and intervene to provide additional support if needed.

²Ibid.

³ See recommendation #4 from the 4/18/12 Regents' meeting.

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2012Meetings/May2012/512bri1.pdf>

⁴The State of Career and Technical Education in New York City, 2013-2014. http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F978F471-B0F0-4D4C-B8A2-0DBC91A68D46/0/StateofCTE_online.pdf

⁵New York Civil Liberties Union. *Educating for the 21st Century: Data Report on the New York Performance Standards Consortium*. June 2012. http://www.nyclu.org/files/releases/testing_consortium_report.pdf

There is currently no way to obtain a high school diploma in New York State that is not dependent on high-stakes tests. Given that the Local Diploma was no longer available to general education students as of June 2012, all students must now pass five Regents exams with a minimum score of 65 in order to earn a high school diploma. Currently, the Local Diploma is only available as a “safety net” option to students receiving special education. CCC does not believe this to be an adequate solution.

While it is encouraging that the Board of Regents has begun to have discussions about alternative pathways to graduation, we feel strongly that these pathways must be available to all students, not just students with disabilities. Furthermore, there is a need in particular for a pathway to a diploma that includes alternate forms of assessment for students who may be unable to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on standardized tests. Through no fault of their own, there are some students in New York State who will be unable to pass Regents exams, though they have worked diligently to fulfill all other requirements for graduation and are poised for postsecondary success.

Providing data regarding the provision of arts instruction requirements, Int. No. 925

CCC believes that arts education is a critical component of a rigorous and well-rounded curriculum, and that all students should have access to quality arts instruction during the school day. It has been well-documented that art education positively impacts English and Math achievement, stimulates students’ creativity and problem-solving skills, and promotes student engagement in school.⁶

CCC appreciates the Council’s interest in promoting art education and gathering data on the number and percentage of total students, English Language Learners, and special education students (in grades 5-12) who have completed State arts instruction requirements (and those completing under 50%, 50%, and 75% of requirements), as well as the number of full-time and part-time certified arts instructors, demographic data regarding the racial and ethnic composition of the schools, and allowing the data to be aggregated citywide, as well as by council district, community school district and school.

While CCC is generally supportive of this legislation and the interest in tracking data on arts instruction, we urge the Council to work with DOE to ensure that the data requested is not too onerous for DOE to produce.

It is CCC’s hope that reporting data on instruction in the arts to the City Council and to the public will ensure that the Department of Education both supports schools in their efforts and holds them accountable for providing quality arts education to all students according to State requirements. CCC believes that this data collection effort will promote transparency, as well as give students, parents, school leaders, and elected officials important information about the strengths and needs of schools. Ultimately, we hope that the data collected will help to drive the expansion of arts education in New York City public schools. That said, it is critical that the data reported to the Council be manageable for

⁶ For example, see Arts Education Partnership’s Preparing Students for the Next America: The Benefits of an Arts Education. <http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Preparing-Students-for-the-Next-America-FINAL.pdf>

the staff at DOE. In addition to wanting to ensure that the legislation is not too onerous, we have several additional recommendations that we believe could enhance the legislation:

- Ensure that the definition of arts instruction in the bill clearly refers to music, dance, theater and visual and media arts. CCC suggests that the bill be amended to include specific language regarding the key components of arts education.
- Amend the legislation to include grades pre-kindergarten through four, in addition to grades five through twelve. We believe it is important for all schools to report on art instruction and staffing, and that elementary schools must not be excluded.
- In addition to reporting on arts instruction, include a requirement that DOE report on physical education and the percent/number of students meeting State requirements for physical education. Despite the fact that studies have clearly demonstrated the health and academic benefits of physical education, many public school children are not getting the physical education instruction and time that they need. Many schools in New York City are not meeting the New York State requirements for physical education, and CCC believes that including physical education in this bill would be an important step in holding schools accountable for meeting State requirements.

Requiring the Department of Education to distribute information on college savings plans to students, Int. No. 1091

CCC supports Int. No. 1091, which would require distribution of information on college savings plans to all students. Specifically, the legislation would require the DOE to develop written or electronic materials with information on how to open a bank account and about the college-savings programs available to students; distribute these materials to every student upon entry to kindergarten, grade 6, grade 9 and to every student entering a new school; and maintain the materials at a central office in each school.

The costs of a college education are extremely high, sometimes leaving college attendance out of reach for qualified high school graduates. For example, the City University of New York (CUNY) estimated that for the spring 2012 term the total cost of attendance for a resident CUNY student who lived at home was over \$12,000. Many New York families find saving these amounts for their children's higher education to be an overwhelming challenge. We therefore appreciate Int. No. 1091, which could help New Yorkers, especially those with limited access to financial institutions, effectuate their families' college savings goals.

While CCC is supportive of the legislation, we respectfully submit several amendments that we believe could enhance the bill and make it less onerous for DOE.

- Shift responsibility for drafting the materials to the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA). The legislation requires DOE to create the materials that contain information about college savings plans and how to open a bank account. We suggest that the bill be amended to make the

Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) responsible for creating the content of the materials, as DCA is the City agency with more substantive knowledge about the financial world. We suggest that DCA collaborate with DOE to ensure that the resulting materials are user-friendly, easy to understand, and produced in various languages.

DCA, especially through its Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE), has been extremely successful in educating New Yorkers about financial services and improving New Yorkers' access to savings opportunities. As a result of these experiences, DCA could provide valuable insight into what should be included in the materials and how the content could be clearly communicated to parents with varying levels of financial literacy.⁷

- Include information about where parents can seek free counseling and answers to their questions about college savings plans in the materials. CCC suggests that, in addition to providing information about how to open bank accounts and about college savings plans, the materials include contact information for city agency staff and/or community-based organizations able to assist families seeking to open bank accounts and start college savings plans.

A large number of New Yorkers have little, if any, relationship with banks and financial products. For example, according to OFE, 825,000 adult New Yorkers were "unbanked," meaning they did not have a bank account.⁸ Because of this lack of experience with traditional financial institutions, parents who receive the distributed materials may not know how to use the information provided. They may also be unable to pay a professional who can advise them. These New Yorkers will need information about where they can turn for free financial counseling, which therefore should be included in the materials.

- Provide these materials to families with younger children. We believe that the banking and college savings materials created as a result of this legislation would not only be beneficial to families with children who are starting kindergarten, but also to families with even younger children. We suggest the legislation require the materials to be shared with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), for distribution to parents of children in ACS child care, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs. It is never too early to begin saving for a child's college education. This is true not just because of the high cost of higher education, but also because having dedicated college savings has been shown to impact a child's development of a college-bound identity. Helping parents of the youngest New Yorkers begin to save for college should also be a priority, and we therefore ask that DOE share its college savings materials with ACS.

⁷On a related note, although outside the scope of this hearing, we greatly appreciate OFE's efforts to educate and empower New York City consumers, and hope to see support for their work continue as we transition to a new Administration.

⁸ New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, Financial Empowerment Brief, Feb. 2011.
http://www.nyc.gov/html/ofe/downloads/pdr/fe_brief_february2011.pdf

Conclusion

It is CCC's hope that all children receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for college and career. There must be a balance between standardized tests and other forms of assessment, and information gleaned from assessments must be viewed holistically in evaluating teachers and schools. In CCC's view, the arts are a critical component of a comprehensive education, and all students should have access to quality art instruction. Lastly, we appreciate the City Council's efforts to ensure that all students have information about college savings plans, to help make attending college possible for more students.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the City Council's Res. No. 1394, Int. No 925, and Into. No. 1091, and we are encouraged by the public dialogue about how to ensure all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career both academically and financially.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council

Committee on Education

Re: The Impact of Standardized Testing on Graduation

November 25, 2013

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Good afternoon. My name is Abja Midha and I am a project director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students who are learning English, students with disabilities, and students of color. Advocates for Children also coordinates the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma, a statewide coalition of educational and advocacy organizations and families who have come together to urge the creation of multiple pathways to a diploma in New York State, each of which holds all students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities.

At Advocates for Children, we see the impact of high-stakes standardized testing in a variety of ways, including cumbersome processes for providing accommodations to students with disabilities and English Language Learners. I'm



going to focus my testimony today on high school exit exams.

In New York City, 39.6 percent of high school students fail to graduate from high school within four years.¹ The figures are even higher for students with disabilities and English language learners, at 72.4 percent and 64.6 percent, respectively. Many of these students do not graduate high school because they are unable to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on high-stakes standardized exit exams.

New York State has among the most onerous high school exit exam requirements in the nation. All students must pass five Regents exams in order to graduate from a New York public high school: English-Language Arts, Math, Science, World History, and United States History. While we support high standards of student achievement, based on our experiences working with New York City youth, we believe that the State's focus on high-stakes standardized exit exams creates unnecessary barriers to graduation. For example, Advocates for Children recently worked with a 22-year-old who attended a comprehensive high school in New York City and has taken the Regents examinations 37 times over the course of the past 6 years. This student had excellent attendance throughout high school and passed all of his classes on his first try. He also finished the twelfth grade on time,

¹ Source: New York State Education Department, Graduation Rates 2013.



having earned all of the credits he needed to graduate, and also having passed all of the courses necessary to earn an Automotive Career and Technical Education (CTE) certificate. He loved his automotive classes and during his senior year applied to technical colleges where he could continue to study automotive sciences and start his career as an auto mechanic. However, because he had yet to pass the exams necessary to earn his diploma, his school could not release his CTE certificate and he could not start college.

Without a high school diploma, students are denied access to college and careers. It is time for New York State to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and take responsibility for the thousands of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school because of high-stakes standardized testing. Specifically, we recommend that the State:

1. Reduce the number of Regents exams required to graduate from 5 to 3.

The English Regents, one Math Regents, and one Science Regents still would be required for graduation. Maintaining exam requirements in these subjects would give the State the flexibility to use these assessments to comply with federal testing requirements under No Child Left Behind.

2. Develop a pathway to graduation that allows all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through performance-based assessments in lieu of the Regents exams. Performance-based assessments allow students to



show their attainment of standards by completing a series of tasks/projects in contexts that are familiar and relevant to their high school experiences.

We urge the City Council to call upon the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents to create viable paths to graduation and college and career readiness for our students that do not rely on high-stakes standardized testing. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today.

New York City Council Hearing on the Impact of Standardized Testing on DOE Students

Testimony by Max Ahmed, New York Immigration Coalition November 25, 2013

Good afternoon and thank you to the members of the Council for convening this hearing. My name is Max Ahmed and I am the Education Program Associate at the New York Immigration Coalition. We are an umbrella policy and advocacy organization with nearly 200 member organizations, and we aim to achieve a fairer and more just society that values the contributions of immigrants and extends opportunity to all. As part of this work, we convene a Collaborative of immigrant organizations that fights for quality education for immigrant and English language learner students.

There are nearly 160,000 English language learners – or ELLs – in New York City’s public schools. ELLs have enormous potential – once they learn English, they outperform their native English speaking peers – and ELLs have unique language skills, a major advantage in today’s global economy. Despite these assets, ELLs are being left far behind. A meager 35% of ELLs graduate in four years and proficiency scores on this year’s Grades 3 through 8 tests – at 3.4% in English and 11.4% in Math – were so abysmal, they amount to a crisis for our ELLs— both in how we educate them and in how we evaluate their capacities.

ELLs face tremendous challenges in school—they must simultaneously master new content and a new language, and those born outside the US must navigate a new culture too. Standardized tests are, by their nature, language dependent and make it harder for ELLs to show what they’ve learned. These tests are not full measures of what ELLs know, and they’re not capable of assessing characteristics like tenacity and grit – so common among immigrant families – that influence persistence in school and success in life.

Using standardized tests for high-stakes decisions exacerbates the problem and constricts opportunity. The State English and Math test scores I mentioned earlier are used to inform decisions about admission to some middle and high schools. Admission to the City’s Specialized high schools is based on another standardized test. In order to receive a diploma, New York’s students must pass at least 5 Regents exams.¹ According to a report by the Community Service Society, after CUNY’s senior colleges raised their minimum SAT requirements, the representation of Latino and black students decreased. We are concerned about ELLs being part of this trend and facing fewer options for higher education as a result.

There is a psychological component to the impact as well. ELLs work so hard to meet their formidable challenges and, even though standardized tests are problematic measures of their capabilities, poor results can still be tremendously discouraging to them, and to their parents. The same goes for the teachers who have signed up to do a challenging and important job and are already in short supply.

Given these dynamics, and the fact that ELLs are being left behind now, the City should take immediate action. It should:

- Stop using standardized test results for ELLs in high stakes decisions within the City’s control;
- Advocate on behalf of the City’s students for the State to encourage broader use and give greater weight to performance-based assessments, which have particular value when educating ELLs;

¹ Students may appeal up to 2 Regents exams to graduate upon meeting a specific set of requirements. Subject to meeting requirements, they may also substitute a minimum acceptable score on a department-approved alternative exam such as the SAT II or Advanced Placement exam.

- Support the possibility of New York State using the federal waiver process to allow native-language state assessments for recently arrived students in grades 3-8;
- Work with CUNY to address barriers to ELL admission.

While standardized tests are problematic, ELLs lag so far behind that the City cannot afford to focus on assessment issues alone to boost achievement. The City must act now to create a system-wide initiative to expand ELLs' access to the quality programs and additional supports they need to master English and be ready for college and careers. We know that with the right kind of support, like that provided by models such as Internationals Network for Public Schools, ELLs' achievements are extraordinary. We must honor that potential.



Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC)

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Co-Chair – Alim Gafar

1st Vice-Chair – Ben Greene

Recording Secretary – Nancy Northrop

Corresponding Secretary – Rhonda Joseph

Co-Chair – Martha Kessler

2nd Vice-Chair – Yvette Small

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Parliamentarian - Katy Stokes

Good Afternoon: My name is Martha Kessler, I am the co-chair of CPAC, The Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council. We represent Parent Associations and PTA's from every Public School District in the City as well as High Schools and District 75.

I'm here to testify on the following two items.

Int. No. 925 - In relation to requiring the Department of Education to provide data regarding the provision of arts instructional requirements.

We are in favor of this law. Parents want to see their children have a well rounded education. Music and Arts classes outside of school are often prohibitively expensive. We worry that with ever continuing budget cuts and ever increasing pressure from standardized testing that access to arts instruction will be curtailed in the majority of schools.

It would also be illuminating to gather data on the funding sources for the arts programming in schools as many parent associations are raising the money to support these programs, which is creating further disparity in the access to arts instruction.

Besides gathering this data, we would like to see some follow through. Are the results of the studies regarding the benefits of arts instruction (among other things) compelling enough for the DOE to make a real commitment towards sustaining and increasing meaningful arts programming in schools from K-12th Grade? Is the DOE willing to mandate and invest in an arts curriculum with the funding to support it?

Res. No. 1394 - Resolution calling upon the New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing.

While we accept that there is a need to track student progress and testing should be part of this, most parents agree that the reliance upon test scores for so many things – school grades, teacher's grades, promotion eligibility and more is not working. It discriminates against schools and teachers that serve our most needy communities. It discriminates against our children with special needs and children for whom English is a second language.

What did the test scores from the last academic year show us? It illuminated the fact that children of New York City living in poverty, with special needs, our English language learners are all lagging badly. What we believe is that the way to fix this disparity is not with more tests. We would be better served using the vast quantity of money that it takes to create, administer and evaluate these tests to support our schools and teachers in a real way by reversing the crippling budget cuts that have impacted our schools.

The disparity in academic performance caused by economic disadvantage is not a surprising piece of news and I know that each one of us who is a stakeholder in this system; the parents, teachers, principals, networks, and the Chancellor himself wants to see every last one of our children thriving at their school. What ever our differences of opinions we all are working toward the same goal.

November 25, 2013

Dear Speaker Quinn, Chairman Jackson, and Members of the City Council:

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. My name is Martha Foote. I am a public school parent and a member of Time Out From Testing. I am here today to ask for your support of Resolution No. 1394, calling upon the New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing.

Simply put, high-stakes testing does not work. It does not improve teaching and learning, and it does not improve our schools. Under Mayor Bloomberg, New York City has been at the forefront of high-stakes testing policies, and what do we have to show for it? New York City's NAEP scores – the only testing measure that has not been corrupted by teaching to the test – have stagnated, and our high school graduates are woefully unprepared for college academic work. Our school children are not being taught to think, to write deeply and critically, to research and analyze. They are being taught to fill in bubbles and write formulaic essays on state standardized tests. Why? Because their state test scores are weighted so heavily in high-stakes decisions: school closings, grade promotions, middle school and high school placement, graduation, and now teacher evaluations.

My own son, who is now in 6th grade, is usually an engaged and enthusiastic learner. He was also fortunate to attend an elementary school that was not at risk of closure and thus did not engage in year-round test prep. However, once the state teacher evaluation law was passed and his teachers' jobs hinged on their students' test scores, I saw the test prep at his school ramp up considerably – and his enthusiasm for school drop precipitously. Painfully, he began to hate going to school, resenting the suspension of in-depth and creative class projects for daily practice writing mind-numbing rote essays and answering multiple-choice questions over and over and over. All this test prep, all this teaching to the test did nothing to increase or enhance my child's learning. Instead it served to ensure his test scores would be as high as they could be so his teacher would look like a good teacher. Pretty ironic – his teacher engaged in lousy teaching so the measure of his teaching – i.e., the state test scores – would look terrific.

As City Council Members, you now have a chance to make history. By passing Resolution 1394, you can send a strong signal that New York City is ready to move away from high-stakes testing and towards a system of multiple measures that truly reflects a child's achievements. That New York City is ready to listen to parents who have had enough of policies that are harming education and crushing their children's hopes and spirits. That New York City is ready to stand up to Albany and urge a better way.

Thank you.

Martha Foote – member of Time Out From Testing
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Testimony in support of City Council Resolution 1394-2012

Jeff Nichols

Change the Stakes

November 25, 2013

Thank you Councilman Jackson for this opportunity to testify in favor of Resolution 1394. My name is Jeff Nichols. My wife, Anne Stone and I have two young children, Aaron and Gabriel, in fifth and fourth grades respectively. We belong to Change the Stakes, a group of parents and educators with no budget, no hierarchy, which anyone can join, a group of citizens united by outrage over the astonishing direction education has taken in recent years.

In an era of economic scarcity, we are wasting billions of dollars on the futile search for an illusory accountability system that will finally allow us to quantify the relationship between a teacher and a child. Think about that for a minute. Is there a more complex structure in the universe than the human brain? And we're talking about interactions between two of them. We want a single score or rating to explain how one affects the other. It is beyond my comprehension, but this search is the driving force in national education policy today, despite the fact that not only teachers and parents in ever-increasing numbers, but testing and assessment experts as well decry this practice – not because any of us thinks our children shouldn't be challenged by difficult tasks in school, or that the performance of teachers in the classroom should not be judged by the highest standards, but because there is no scientific validity whatsoever to the use of these tests as the primary instrument for evaluating children and teachers. We cannot kid ourselves that just because high-stakes testing has become predominant in our schools, it is moral or even rational. Societies go astray just as individuals do. The greatness of the United States is not that we are immune from committing profound social wrongs, but that our system of government allows us to right them.

The tide is turning against the abuse of standardized testing. Now city education officials say they agree with us that test-driven education is wrong, but their hands are tied by state officials, who in turn say they are compelled by federal law. This passing of the buck has to stop. In the United States, we do not accept "I was just following orders" as an excuse for violations of basic rights, like that of our children to a public education based on best practices of the profession. When the state tries to compel educational malpractice, it is the right of citizens to civilly disobey. My wife and I have boycotted standardized tests since they stole our then-third grader's love of school from him two years ago. We and our fellow parents and teachers at Change the Stakes ask that our local leaders refuse to follow misguidance from above and fulfill their obligation to meet the educational needs of their constituents' children. Resolution 1394 is a great step in that direction. But we want more -- much more. New York City is universally recognized as a major cultural and economic center. Let us also become known as world leaders in education, not just rejecting wrong policies, but promoting true innovation in the classroom by allowing public school teachers the same intellectual freedom that teachers enjoy in the exclusive

private schools most of our political leaders send their children to. As the great education scholar Yong Zhao has argued, if we need everybody to be creative, entrepreneurial, globally competent, we need a new paradigm. It would seek not to reduce human diversity through pervasive testing and standardized curricula, but to expand human diversity through the values of progressive education. As he says, "America cannot afford to catch up to others, we must lead the way, be the first to take on so-called progressive education not as something nice to do, but as an economic necessity." And the central value of progressive education is the empowerment of the individual mind, be it of teacher or child -- its liberation from arbitrary and constrictive external mandates.

Today the best our highest education authorities can do to justify their policies is to drone on endlessly about "college and career readiness." To them I ask, what about citizenship readiness? How are teachers supposed to convey to their students what it means to be members of a democratic society when they are denied any meaningful say in curricula or teaching methods, when the terms of their employment include the equivalent of loyalty oaths, threats of termination if they fail to promote and prepare kids for the endless testing?

Teachers should instill democratic values in children by participating themselves in the governance of our schools, in which they, along with parents and concerned members of the local community, have real power.

And teachers should instill critical and creative thinking by modeling the same in the projects, assignments, and curricula they design. They cannot do that if their job description is to spew Common Core scripts.

We ask the City Council to exercise its powers to place educators in charge of education again, backing teachers and parents as we retake control of our schools and free them of the destructive influence of those who view public education not as the foundation of our democracy but as an investment opportunity.

And I have a message for our new mayor: the teachers of this city know exactly what our children need. They should not have to compete with anyone for your attention. We voted for you over opponents promoting the so-called education reform agenda because we expect you to restore the authority of teachers over their own classrooms, because they, and only they, are the professionals who know and understand our children's educational needs. They should have your undivided attention as you craft your education policies; only one other group should be on a par with them: parents.

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<http://changethestakes.wordpress.com/>

November 24, 2013

Hello, Members of the Council.

My name is Michelle Kupper. I'm the mother of a three-year-old and a second grader who goes to PS 29 in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. I hold a doctorate in sociology of education, and as a parent and as a professional, I am deeply concerned about the direction of education.

I am also a member of the Community Education Council (CEC) for District 15, and I am here today to speak on behalf of fellow CEC members from around the city to urge you to pass Resolution 1394.

Representatives from CECs as well as the citywide education councils came together to forge a letter to Mayor-Elect DeBlasio regarding the changes we need to see in education. I will read an excerpt from the letter on the impact of high-stakes testing on students, schools, and teachers.

"Parents, teachers and administrators are all increasingly troubled by the growing emphasis on high-stakes testing and its impact on our schools' teaching environment. Under the rubric of "accountability," high-stakes tests have achieved a dominance that is dramatically changing classroom culture. Instead of a classroom environment which encourages curiosity and critical thinking – rooted in teachers' freedom to make professional, independent decisions about instruction and curriculum – we're seeing our schools pressured to "teach to the test" and supplant regular instruction with test prep, since school test performance reluctantly takes administrative priority. The number of classroom hours spent in test-taking (six days this past spring) and preparing for them takes away valuable and irreplaceable teaching time, and the quality of teaching in our children's classrooms is sadly compromised.

While we acknowledge that testing in and of itself has its uses for assessment or to periodically gauge aspects of student achievement, most educators and many education policy makers concur that the state tests do not fit the extremely high stakes purposes for which they are being used. Many of the test questions currently in use have been flagged as pedagogically unsound, and the tests overall produce overly narrow, inconsistent and unreliable measures of student progress and accomplishment. High-stakes tests are also completely developmentally inappropriate for K-2 students (the newest, youngest age group targeted for them) – as a whole chorus of child development specialists and educators can attest. Yet the tests are being used as both gatekeepers to determine students' qualifications to advance a grade and to judge the overall quality of schools.

We recommend that you place a moratorium on the use of these tests in these "high stakes" capacities, and take a firm stand against the use of tests in kindergarten through second grades, which seems a harmful trend.

Most recently, and perhaps most insidiously, the state test results are being used as a measure of teacher performance. The decision to link student performance on state tests to a value-added algorithm assessing teacher quality makes students and parents unwitting or unwilling collaborators in an evaluation system that lacks validity, contributes to lowered morale, and may result in wrongfully negative teacher assessments and concomitant job insecurity. A recent, rigorously researched study shows that, amidst our national worries about how U.S. students compare internationally in academics, middle-class U.S. students perform on a par with the highest achieving nations.¹ When the data is disaggregated, the differentiations we see are mostly related to socio-economic status. In short, poverty is the root problem in struggling schools, not bad teachers.

We recommend that you work to modify this aspect of the teacher evaluation, recognizing that this may involve re-negotiating Race to the Top monies."

City Council members, passing this resolution to re-examine our current accountability system is an essential step in the right direction. Thank you.

¹ Carnoy, M. & Rothstein, R. "What Do International Tests Really Show About U.S. Student Performance?" *Economic Policy Institute Report*, Jan. 28, 2013.

**Statement on Proposal to Distribute
Information on College Savings Plans to Department of Education Students
Before the New York City Council
Daniel D. Reyes, Senior Manager
Vanguard Education Savings Group
November 22, 2013**

Thank you for your invitation to submit a statement to the New York City Council (the "Council") regarding Int. No. 1091, a proposal to amend the administrative code of the City of New York to require the Department of Education to distribute information on college savings plans to all students. The Vanguard Group, Inc. ("Vanguard") manages approximately \$2.5 trillion in investment assets on behalf of retail and institutional investors, including approximately \$50 billion within our Education Savings Group ("ESG"). New York's Direct 529 College Savings Plan (the "Direct Plan") represents over \$14 billion of ESG's assets under management. The Direct Plan is administered by New York's Office of the State Comptroller and the Higher Education Services Corporation, and Vanguard provides investment management and distribution services to the Direct Plan.

Section 529 college savings plans, such as the Direct Plan, are tax-favored investment vehicles that make setting aside money for qualified higher education expenses convenient and easy. Account owners may contribute to one or more of the 16 investment options included in the Direct Plan, including several age-based options that enable account owners to align their investment risk tolerance with the account beneficiary's age. Investments in the Direct Plan grow on a tax-deferred basis and withdrawals are exempt from federal income tax when used to pay qualified higher education expenses. New York State taxpayers and account owners may also be entitled to a state income tax deduction of

up to \$5,000 (\$10,000 for married couples filing jointly) per year on contributions to a Direct Plan account.

Vanguard applauds the Council for being a strong proponent of education and awareness around the importance of attending and saving for college. Obtaining a college degree can have meaningful long-term implications for an individual's future economic prospects. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, college graduates earn an average of \$1 million more than high school graduates during their careers.¹ The value of an investment in a college education grows for a lifetime.

We know from working with our retail clients that saving for college is among investors' top financial goals. College savers, however, have faced multiple headwinds over the past several years. In particular, the cost of a college education has increased steadily over the last decade. After adjusting for inflation, the average cost of college tuition and fees at four-year public institutions has increased nearly 51% over the past 10 years.² Along with increasing college tuition prices, we have observed the total amount of U.S. student loan debt outstanding rise from approximately \$200 billion in 2004 to over \$1 trillion today.³

Given these challenges, increasing awareness around the need and opportunities to save for college is a critical first step to helping all families set their children up for success. Vanguard looks forward to learning more about the Council's strategy as it explores a roll out plan for distributing educational material to all parents and guardians of students on the importance of saving for college.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

² The College Board, 2009

³ Federal Reserve Bank of New York Consumer Credit Panel / Equifax

FOR THE RECORD

11/25/13

Dear Education Committee Members,

I am hugely opposed to the ever-increasing emphasis on standardized testing, and the waste of resources of time and money – to say nothing of the harm done to students' enthusiasm for learning or engagement with the arts – that results.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to an aspect of the problem that is not often discussed. This is the fact that school teachers in NYC are expected each spring to leave their classrooms and their students to spend days grading the standardized math and ELA tests.

Let me share examples from my two sons' schools. Two years ago, teachers at both of my sons' New York City public schools were obliged to leave their classes in the hands of substitutes, while they graded other schools' standardized tests. My son's fifth grade teacher missed every Thursday for three weeks. Teachers at my older son's school missed even more days with their students. The principal of his middle school wrote to parents in late April:

"Monday began a five-week period in which testing interferes with every aspect of the school program. During the six days of testing, three this past week and three days next week, every student will miss a minimum of 18 class periods. The six test days will be followed by three weeks, in which fourteen teachers ... will each be pulled out of school for five days, so they can assist in grading the tests ... This is what we are expected to do so the students can be tested!"

Last year, the boys were together in middle-school and the principal and parent body elected to spend tens of thousands of dollars to pay for replacements to grade the tests, in order to avoid having the schools' own teachers leave their students behind in order to serve as test graders. However, this put a huge economic burden on our school. Moreover, this option is fundamentally inequitable. Poorer schools, with less money raised by their PTAs, do not have the ability to pay their way out of this problem.

I find the current situation shameful. We must come up with a better system than that currently in place, in which teachers must leave their students to grade tests. Peterson could bare the cost of test-graders. Or tests could be graded over the summer. Or, better yet, testing itself could -- and should -- be scaled back.

Thank you,

Cynthia Wachtell
Director of the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program &
Research Associate Professor of American Studies
Stern College
Yeshiva University

FOR THE RECORD

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

November 19, 2013

To: New York City Council

Re: Resolution No. 1394

Dear Speaker Quinn and Members of the Council:

Thank you. My name is Dr. Monty Neill and I am Executive Director of FairTest, the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, headquartered in Boston. We are the nation's sole organization focused on assessment reform. We address a range of issues, including standardized test quality, responsible uses of test and assessment results, and the development of educationally beneficial assessments.

I am writing to support Resolution No. 1394, calling upon the New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing. Thank you for requesting my testimony.

I emphasize, first, that every claim in the resolution before you is supported by extensive evidence. (See, for example, the detailed discussion, bibliography and attachments to my testimony of October to the New York Senate Education Committee, referenced at the end of this testimony.) I will share with you some of our findings and conclusions from around the nation, information we hope will contextualize and illuminate the evidence you are gathering from New York City.

FairTest co-sponsored a National Resolution on High-Stakes Testing. To date, that resolution has garnered the signatures of more than 620 organizations and 18,000 individuals. We also know that many school boards, in New York and around the nation, have adopted similar resolutions. In particular, more than 80% of the school boards in Texas endorsed a statement that standardized testing is "strangling" education. We do not know of city councils adopting this or a similar resolution. The New York City Council should take the lead.

Across the nation, in rapidly growing numbers, parents are boycotting standardized testing. Just recently, 90 percent of the parents of children in Kindergarten through grade two at Castle Bridge elementary in Washington Heights refused to allow their children to be subjected to tests whose sole purpose is to judge teachers. One parent called the testing "inhumane." Last spring,

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boycotts and high-school student walkouts erupted from coast to coast, while many thousands of parents and teachers demonstrated against the testing regime. We have recently seen that opposition wherever Commissioner King has appeared to defend the testing attached to the Common Core State Standards. On a recent PDK/Gallup national survey, 41% of respondents said the additional testing of recent years made no difference in school performance and 36% said it hurt school performance. And just the other day, a Siena College poll reported that 52% of New York respondents now believe there is too much testing.

Why?

First, testing has become all-consuming. One New York City school pulled 5-year-olds out of their classrooms for test prep tutoring. Children took mini-tests daily, bigger tests every two weeks, then quarterly tests, then end of year tests.

Over-testing is not just a New York phenomenon. Chicago had 14 mandated tests for kindergarteners last year, and nearly as many in grades one and two. Pittsburgh has 35 tests in grade 4, with nearly as many in some other grades. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) alone requires far more standardized testing than other nations, to which federal, state and district mandates have piled on vastly more. No other economically advanced nation tests in more than a few grades, and high-ranking Finland simply does not administer standardized exams in public schools.

While New York City cannot by itself end federal and state requirements, it can halt all the 'interim' or 'benchmark' tests inflicted on children during the year. Passage of this resolution will encourage Mayor-elect DiBlasio dramatically reduce the amount of district-mandated testing.

A major cause of over-testing is the mandate to judge every teacher in every subject every year, due to New York's unfortunate decision to participate in Race to the Top. This resolution cannot end that mistake, but it can help by sending a clear public signal against this dangerous escalation of testing.

Second, tests are used to make high-stakes decisions: students are denied graduation, or as in New York City grade promotion. Retained children may score higher in the next few years, but those gains fade, and retained children are much more likely to drop out of school. Extensive research shows that high-stakes exit tests increase the dropout rate and do not produce graduates who are better prepared for college or careers. They are linked to an increase in incarceration. Teachers lose their jobs and schools are closed on the basis of test scores. Those are all terrible misuses of a limited tool. They violate the standards of the measurement profession itself. No other nation uses student scores to judge teachers or schools. This resolution will help the new Mayor end the use of tests to determine grade promotion, and it signals state officials to reconsider other high-stakes testing.

Third, the tests are poor quality. They are now, and will remain under PARCC, mostly multiple-choice. They do not and will not measure very much of what our children need to know and be able to do as successful adults. And when high stakes are attached, they undermine important teaching and learning because schools are pressured to narrow the curriculum and teach to the test in order to boost scores.

The reliance on high-stakes testing has not improved student learning. NCLB designates the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as the primary evidence as to the success of the law. The rate of progress on NAEP has slowed or ground to a halt since NCLB took effect. This slowdown has affected both reading and math, at all grades tested, for almost every demographic group. Gaps among racial groups are in some cases wider than they were in 1988. NCLB is a failure.

The Common Core PARCC tests will not solve the problems. They will remain too long and developmentally inappropriate for young children. They will not adequately assess higher order thinking and skills. The limited inclusion of performance tasks will not overcome pressure to focus on rote learning to prepare for multiple-choice and short answer questions. Because they too will be high-stakes, they will continue to cause narrowed curriculum, teaching to the test, and student disengagement and pushout. This resolution affirms the need for New York City, like the U.S. as a whole, to change course.

The focus on testing is also a diversion. So-called reformers claim that testing will produce better schools, and better schools will solve the problems of poverty and racial inequality. Both claims are false. In my recent testimony to the New York Senate Education Committee, I provided extensive evidence as to how high-stakes, high-volume testing undermines student learning. But by focusing on testing and schools, the reformers also avoid inconvenient truths about poverty and increasing wealth inequality.

Compared with other economically advanced nations, the U.S. has the highest rates of child poverty and very low rates of pre-natal care and provision of high-quality child-care. Much evidence shows that U.S. wealth and income gaps are at their widest since the age of the robber barons.

In fact, schools account for about a quarter of the difference in student outcomes. Schools cannot solve poverty, but they can make an important difference in children's lives. However, unlike most western European nations which provide more support to schools serving low-income communities, the U.S. tends to provide more resources to those who already have more, while underfunding schools attended by children in greater need.

The goal of public education should be to help all children develop their talents so they can contribute to our society's well-being and progress. The main purpose of student assessment should be to help students improve their learning. This means, first of all, useful feedback to students, but also accurate and rich information to guide policymakers and the public toward making good decisions.

New York City has the nation's best example of an assessment system that strengthens student learning, produces greatly improved outcomes, and provides solid evidence to the public. The New York Performance Standards Consortium includes 39 public schools, most of them in the City. To graduate, students must pass the Regents language arts exam, but do not need to take any other Regents tests.

Instead, they produce extended tasks in language arts, math, science and history. The tasks are judged by committees that include outside experts, and students must orally defend their projects

before the committees. Consortium schools use a common scoring guide and samples are re-scored independently to ensure consistency across schools.

The schools are demographically comparable to the New York City student body. Their graduation rates are nearly double the city average for students with disabilities and more than 50 percent higher for English language learners. They are higher for African American and Latino students. Their graduates enroll in college at significantly greater rates. 90 percent of those attending 4-year colleges are still enrolled in year three, well above the national average that includes wealthy and middle-income students. Consortium schools retain their teachers at far higher rates, and their student suspension rates are far lower.

Again, while New York City cannot change federal or state law, your actions in support of this resolution will help win necessary changes to those laws. Passage of the resolution will help move the new administration in the educationally sound direction of reducing the amount of testing, ending high-stakes misuses such as grade-promotion, and supporting the expansion of superior ways to evaluate students and schools.

Thank you, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have. You may reach me at 617-477-9792 or monty@fairtest.org.

- New York Senate Education Committee testimony is available at http://www.nysenate.gov/files/pdfs/Monty%20Neill.FairTest_0.pdf.
- Information about the NY Performance Standards Consortium is available at <http://performanceassessment.org/>.

FOR THE RECORD

City Council Hearing on Arts Education: November 25, 2013

**Testimony by: Steven Tennen
Executive Director
The ArtsConnection, Inc.**

FOR THE RECORD

Good morning. My name is Steven Tennen. I am the Executive Director of ArtsConnection, a 35 year old, city-wide, dedicated arts-in-education organization. We provide arts programming in music, dance, theatre and visual arts to children in over 100 public schools every year; specialized programming for English Language Learners and children on the autism spectrum; as well as professional development in the arts for classroom teachers and arts specialists. Our programming is based upon intensive planning school by school so that every program is individually designed to meet the educational needs of every school we work in. Our teaching artists are skilled professionals in their arts disciplines. We provide them with the training they need to be equally skilled in the classroom and able to engage in a dialog with teachers about the impact of arts instruction on their students.

I am also a member of the Arts Advisory Committee which reports to the Panel for Educational Policy.

First, I want to say that I agree with the proposed Council legislation. I think it is incredibly important to know how many children, grade by grade, are receiving arts educations that meet the NYS requirements for arts instruction. I am pleased that you have included English Language Learners and Special Education students in your request for information.

I would hope that you will also put pressure on the State to put some teeth into these requirements. Yes, the State mandates what students should be learning in the arts grade by grade, but the requirements are not enforced. We need to ensure their enforcement and ensure that budget allocations school by school are sufficient to respond to this mandate.

On the elementary school level, the requirements can be met through instruction delivered by arts specialists, classroom teachers and by outside cultural organizations. During the time when dedicated Project Arts funding was available to each school, we saw a real growth in the amount of arts instruction children were receiving. That money was used to pay part of the salary of a first year arts specialist; to pay for the cost of arts materials (arts supplies, musical instruments, lighting in the auditorium); and to defray the cost of bringing cultural organizations into the schools. I know the Department of Education will say that the Project Arts money is still in each school's budget - but still in the budget without being required to be spent on the arts doesn't solve the problem. Since that dedicated money has effectively disappeared, arts instruction has diminished and private foundations and corporations have drastically cut back on their support of arts in education programming. That cutback is a direct result of the end of Project Arts

funding. When the school system stopped funding the arts, the private funding community took that as a cue to cut back as well.

The Council's CASA initiative is a wonderful example of how the City can support arts instruction afterschool. We need that same effort in support of arts instruction during the school day.

Thank you for this legislation and for creating attention to the role the arts play in the education of all our children. We are in a new century that calls for an imaginative, creative work force ... for the skills that are learned best through immersion in the arts. Let's make sure the requirements are met, funding is restored, and our kids learn those skills.

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TESTIMONY

Oversight: The Impact of Standardized Testing on NYC Public Schools and Students.

New York City Council, Committee on Education
Hon. Robert Jackson, Chair

Monday, November 25, 2013



The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators
Ernest Logan, President
Mark Cannizzaro, Executive Vice President
Randi Herman, PhD, First Vice President
40 Rector Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10006
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Good morning Chairman Jackson and all members of the New York City Council's Committee on Education. My name is Randi Herman and I am the Vice President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on how standardized testing is affecting New York City public schools and the students we as educators and members of the community fight for on a daily basis.

I would like to begin by saying that we support resolution number 1394, calling upon the New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing. It is imperative that we strive to give our 1.1 million New York City students the best education possible. We must work together to close the achievement gap and to ensure that all NYC students achieve academic proficiency. It is not just our job, but our duty to guarantee that NYC students become responsible members of society; after all they are our future!

This is why, with my many years of experience in the NYC school system, I can tell you that high stakes testing should not be the sole factor used to judge students' performance. Let me make this very clear, we are doing the 1.1 million children of NYC a disservice if we continue to judge their academic preparedness solely based on high stakes testing. We are all different and therefore learn differently. As educators and responsible members of society we must make every effort to help and nurture the student as a whole. High stakes testing and testing results should not be used as a tool to tear down schools and demoralize students, teachers and administrators.

I could sit here and give you statistics and show you charts explaining why the over use of high stakes standardized testing does not work. I can also sit here and quote research stating how high stakes testing could be partially to blame for the growing number of school suspensions in recent years, which has doubled from the 1970's to about 3 million students a year nationally according to a study done by Liz Sullivan, chair of Dignity in Schools. Many of our most vulnerable students in some of the neediest neighborhoods already have to deal with tremendous amounts of

stress outside of the school environment. Anecdotally, several of our colleagues reached out to us to share their concerns about the undue stress these tests have caused our students. One principal told us "for the first time in my career I have witnessed children crying during and after the test. I also saw children completely shut down to point in which they stopped taking the test." We are being forced to add additional pressures to our students. My members are seeing more students being turned off from learning, often labeling themselves as failures. Kids are getting sick, vomiting due to the stress of testing or with worry about promotion and retention.

With the added pressure of Law 3012C, (Teacher and Principal Evaluation) mandating that evaluations be solely based on testing, teachers are being pressed to get away from teaching and focus more on testing. A school administrator from Syracuse, with over 27 years of experience decided to retire early regardless of the penalties associated with this action. He became disheartened by the "data driven education system that seeks only conformity, standardization, testing and zombie-like adherence to generic common core standards." He went further to say that "I am not leaving my profession, in truth, it has left me. It no longer exists. I feel as though I have played some game halfway through its fourth quarter, a timeout has been called, my teammates' hands have all been tied, the goal posts moved, all previously scored points and honors expunged and all of the rules altered." How are we to guide the leaders of tomorrow with our hands tied?

Testing can be useful in some cases. Some testing can give educators a great deal of useful information as a tool to teach. However, the DOE is using testing to make decisions about situations that the tests were never meant to assess. How can the DOE justify closing schools, based on a week of testing done during one school year? Why not provide much needed assistance to the school administrators? Why not perform an "intervention" with school officials in order to come up with adequate solutions and help turn these schools around? Why not speak to parents and members of the community that have a vested interest in the education of these students? Is the DOE looking at all possible factors and scenarios before making decisions that impact the community as a whole, or are they instead blaming the teachers and the principals?

Let's also briefly discuss how testing has become a big business. It is disheartening that millions of dollars in potential school funding are being squandered every year on for profit companies that specialize in test preparedness. Millions wasted that should be put into the ever shrinking New York City school budget and utilized to lower class size, increase physical education programs to combat obesity or just restore much needed programs that we have had to do without. Instead, CSA members have to try to do more with less. Let's not forget all the precious learning time lost to students who have to spend weeks preparing for the tests. Students are losing precious learning time in order to learn test taking skills. Educators have to condense their curriculum in order to teach all concepts before testing, which results in loss of learning time for students. Teachers are left with less time to cover the ever changing common core standards.

Teaching for the sake of testing is doing a disservice to our students and our educators. This adds additional stress to the students that must take the exams and to the educators who are pulled out of the classroom for days at a time to score them. It is our duty to provide students with high quality education, an education that will prepare them for college and to be the leaders of tomorrow. We must therefore develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment, assessments that see the student as a whole, not just a number or statistic. The DOE is using high stakes testing as the quintessential element that will miraculously solve all of school's problems. If this system continues, our students WILL become just a statistic, and this is unacceptable!

Thank you for your time and I can answer any questions you might have.

Int. No. 925- In relation to requiring the Department of Education to provide data regarding the provision of arts instructional requirements.

The Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA) strongly endorses this resolution because it adds transparency to a data-driven system that is necessary to better evaluate our arts instructional requirements.

Int. No. 1091- In relation to requiring the Department of Education to distribute information on college savings plans to all students.

The Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA) strongly endorses this resolution because it clearly enables our college-bound students to be prepared for college by recognizing the crucial importance of opening a bank account and becoming aware of the multitude of college-savings programs available to our students. This also supports the DOE policy that we must ensure that our students are college-ready by being fully prepared for the fiscal burdens of a college education.

Res. No. 1394- Resolution calling upon the New York State Education Department, the New York State Legislature, and the Governor to re-examine public school accountability systems and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing.

The Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA) strongly supports this resolution, given the fact that New York City voters spoke resoundingly in favor of a new mayor who believes that we are overly reliant on standardized tests and need multiple standards of evaluation. This resolution recognizes that the DOE is in transition and must be responsive to the mayor-elect and the concerns of the people. To that end, CSA has prepared its own testimony to discuss this in greater depth when we testify on November 25, 2013 at a Council Education Committee Oversight hearing.

FOR THE RECORD

***Annual Report from the Arts Committee
to the Panel on Educational Policy
September 19, 2013***



Arts Education Committee to the PEP

2014 and Beyond

2014 is a critical year for arts education in New York City. We look to a new Mayor in control of our schools, a new Chancellor to oversee those schools and set policy, and the satisfaction of a growing hunger within the leadership of those schools to provide a rich arts education for all 1.1 million students in their charge. We will need leaders who evidence the commitment and creativity to avoid facing an arid landscape in the schools, devoid of the sustenance available for them all in the cultural capital of the world.

This will be happening at the same time new and more challenging standards for a broad liberal arts education, known as the "Common Core" will become the primary measure of teaching and learning in our schools. A heightened desire for arts education at the school level also comes at a time when New York City's federally funded Arts Achieve Project focusing on rich student performance tasks and technology innovations reaches the final year of implementation and moves into a national dissemination phase; a remarkable success. But it also comes on the heels of the recommendations of the Chancellor's Arts in Middle School Committee, detailing a significant decline in support for the arts at that level; a terrible failure. Taken together, however, these initiatives can provide the motivation, evidence and structure to take arts education to another level, worthy of our great City.

This is an opportunity we must seize. The arts in our schools have never before been so well positioned to assume their rightful place in the curriculum, fostering generations of imaginative graduates prepared to fill the jobs of the 21st century and to meeting the demands of employers in all fields for young people who can think creatively.

In its position as a world leader in the arts, New York City must regain its leadership role in arts education by providing such thoughtful and effective programs for all of its students. New initiatives across the country are revitalizing arts education in their local schools. In Chicago every elementary school must offer 120 minutes a week devoted to the arts and have at least one certified arts specialist in every school. In Los Angeles a new initiative will spur partnerships between the cultural community and their schools. We must take the same forward looking approach in New York City.

Background

For the past four years the Arts Committee to the Panel on Educational Priorities has been charged with making recommendations that would strengthen arts education in the City. We took on this task knowing that there already was an arts education structure in place -- a central arts office, discipline directors, Blueprints, an Annual Arts in Schools Report, the development of performance assessments in the arts ---led by competent and talented administrators, a growing contingent of arts specialists in the schools, and a supportive arts community. That infrastructure remains strong and is the basis for strength and viability.

Our recommendations build on that infrastructure.

Cornerstones for Progress

Motivation/The Common Core:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

What is so remarkable about the Common Core is that the higher order skills that they emphasize are skills that are inherent in arts education: interpretation, analysis, the ability to synthesize information, problem solving, the ability to critique and provide evidence, opportunities for creativity and the development of a clear, individual voice.

These are skills that take learning beyond the realm of high stakes testing. They provide an opportunity to balance our education system and make a strong commitment to helping young people develop their aesthetic sense, cultural literacy and mutual respect, as well as a capacity for empathy, capacities that will serve them well as they enter adulthood as engaged citizens.

The goals of the Common Core make the lessons of the arts more valuable in a student's academic and personal development. These goals should serve as motivation to expand the arts in the curriculum and in the school day.

Evidence/Arts Achieve

Arts Achieve is the result of a highly competitive \$4.4 million, 5-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education awarded in 2010. It was one of 49 proposals out of 1,700 to receive funding from the Department's *Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund*.

The goal of Arts Achieve is to create programming that helps close the arts achievement gap and improve outcomes for high-need students. More specifically, the grant aims to:

- Improve student achievement in the arts--visual arts, music, theater, and dance--by implementing balanced arts assessments at the 5th grade, 8th grade and high school levels, that are aligned to academic achievement standards for high-need students.
- Translate assessment results into classroom practices that support improved arts achievement for all students.
- Promote innovations in student/teacher access to content and assessment feedback through the use of technology.

At its conclusion, *Arts Achieve* will result in the creation of on-line educational resources that have been validated and informed by the results of the assessments and made available nationwide during year 5 of the grant. This grant will also enable technology to be introduced into arts classroom practice to facilitate art creation, documentation, and reflection within and beyond the schools. *Arts Achieve* puts formative and summative assessment to work to empower students to reflect, direct, and enhance their experiences and performance in the arts and to connect to resources that they could not otherwise access. The grant will involve 7,200 students during the term of the grant, and has the potential to impact the more than 1.1 million children who attend New York City public schools.

These performance assessments in the arts are having a direct impact on the goal of developing performance assessments in other discipline areas. The Arts Achieve assessments are impacting the DOE's thinking about other Measures of Student Learning aligned with the state mandates for teacher effectiveness and have provided a concrete and adaptable model for authentic performance assessment in the arts.

Structure: The Report of the Chancellor's Arts in Middle Schools Committee

The product of a Committee comprised of arts education leaders with the input of Focus Groups of middle school Principals, the report, while focusing on the challenges of the arts in middle schools, made recommendations that certainly apply to the challenges the arts face on the elementary and secondary levels as well.

As this chart indicates, budgets for arts education across the system have been sharply reduced over the past five years. Monies for schools to bring in outside, professional arts services have declined by 45%. Monies for arts supply

mandated salary increases and not to the hiring of additional arts specialists. In reality, hiring has gone down and the number of certified teachers of the arts in DOE schools has declined. This is an unacceptable trend. We must create an arts education structure that ensures access and equity for 100% of our children.

| The Number of Certified School-Based Arts Teachers by School-Level | | | | | |
|--|------------|--------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| School Year | Elementary | Middle | High School | Other | Grand Total |
| 2004-05 | 464 | 639 | 909 | 257 | 2,269 |
| 2005-06 | 507 | 601 | 961 | 264 | 2,333 |
| 2006-07 | 563 | 585 | 1,003 | 307 | 2,458 |
| 2007-08 | 599 | 573 | 1,038 | 308 | 2,518 |
| 2008-09 | 634 | 557 | 1,056 | 350 | 2,597 |
| 2009-10 | 566 | 510 | 850 | 536 | 2,462 |
| 2010-11 | 561 | 538 | 824 | 558 | 2,481 |
| 2011-12 | 538 | 522 | 816 | 513 | 2,389 |
| 2012-13 | 522 | 511 | 822 | 540 | 2,395 |

Extrapolating from the middle school recommendations we can begin to define a series of system wide recommendations that will provide a structure of resources, support and enforcement that will transform arts education in our city's schools. These are not new ideas. They include:

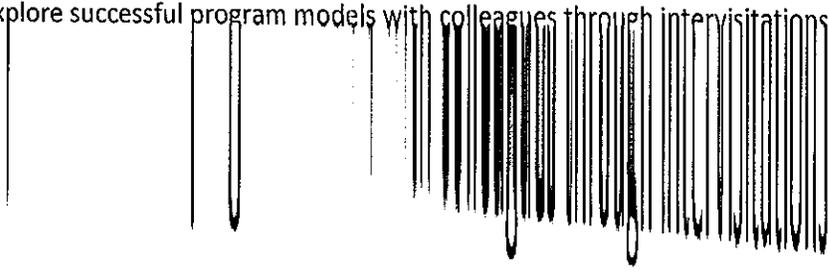
For Policy Makers:

- . Ensure a budget allocation that supports a quality arts education as the birthright of every NYC public school student.
- . Dedicate the current Supplemental Arts Allocation to ensure equity and access.
- . The staff at the OASP cannot oversee instruction in 1,700 schools. Provide qualified and dedicated arts staff at the cluster and network level and in conjunction with the OASP to support schools and school leaders "on the ground."
- . Provide leadership support for new principals through existing leadership preparation programs.
- . Offering teaching artists alternate pathways to teacher certificates and providing schools with additional flexibility of personnel through shared positions.
- . In the same way such extensions are granted to ELL and G&T teachers, NYSED should create license extensions for the arts for eligible elementary school teachers to validate the teaching of the arts that they are allowed to deliver.
- . Ensure that appropriately equipped and dedicated arts space is available in all school settings.

For School Leaders:

- . Develop effective school leader capacity in the arts to enable them to:
 - . Budget for the arts
 - . Schedule arts programming

- . Hire and support qualified arts staff
- . Support collaboration and planning between and among teachers to plan effective instruction
- . Share dedicated space for arts instruction
- . Manage multiple arts partners around the needs and goals of the school
- . Explore successful program models with colleagues through intervisitations



. Provide time in the school day or per session for school Arts Education Liaisons to support the arts in each school site

For Teacher Support in the Arts:

- . Free or subsidized Professional Development for arts teachers to support effective teacher practice and quality
- . Encourage collaboration between arts teachers and classroom and other discipline teachers through shared professional development and planning
- . Funding for teachers for instructional supplies and materials for the arts
- . Create an arts teacher mentoring position in each discipline for new arts teachers

For Parents:

- . Offer support/guidance for parents on the audition process to screened arts programs and the selection of schools with robust arts programs
- . Sponsor local and citywide arts festivals, exhibits and performances that illustrate and celebrate student learning and creativity
- . Provide transition information from elementary to middle and middle to high school
- . Add to School Survey: *"Are there sufficient arts opportunities for students to perform and exhibit art work and for parents to attend these events?" "How often does the school invite you to arts events?"*
- . Support the capacity of parent coordinators and arts education liaisons to inform parents/families and support student exhibits and performances.
- . Convene a parent task force among arts partners to identify strategies for more robust parent engagement

For NYC Arts Community

- . Provide targeted support of audition training for students interested in access to specialized arts schools.
- . Improve quality of partner instruction by establishing clear criteria for evaluating arts partnerships.
- . Capitalize on the expertise of teaching artists to facilitate and support effective teaching practice in schools as per the Arts Achieve model where they serve as facilitators of instruction directly supporting the arts specialists.
- . Develop effective models of collaboration with school leaders such as shared arts teachers and spaces
- . Insure coordination of arts education efforts across partner organizations at a school site.

For the Philanthropic/Business Community

. Coalesce citywide support for an initiative to create a new additional funding stream for the arts: "ArtsCents!" (Whereby a percentage of admissions/ticket sales for arts-related events to be dedicated to arts education)

. Create a clearing house to match donor interest with targeted initiatives supporting arts materials and supplies and schools with needs for particular arts services.

Conclusion

These recommendations provide a framework for reenvisioning arts education across the grades and in all of our schools. We recognize that it is easy to recommend but much harder to act. This committee strongly advocates that it is time for those individuals responsible for making education decisions have the courage to make these important arts education decisions. The Common Core goals, which are so aligned with arts learning, should serve as the motivation to make this happen. We have a responsibility to give all our students equitable access to the sequential arts education they need to be college and career ready. **incentivize sequential arts instruction at all school levels!**

The tools to support arts education are there. There are arts requirements on the books – requirements that mandate what students should be learning in the arts grade by grade. But the requirements are not enforced. We need an administration willing to put some teeth into these requirements – to ensure their enforcement and to ensure that that budget allocations respond to the mandate. Principals need to be accountable that these courses are offered to all students in their schools. **Enforce these requirements!**

Time is always presented as the chief impediment to arts instruction. So much is required of the school day and something must always be left out. Why not reinvent a longer/more flexible school day. To ensure that there is enough time in the day to devote to the arts we have to become more inventive. This means more creative scheduling, a staggered school day for teachers of the arts, small schools sharing arts teachers, and schools in close geographic proximity meeting demand through cadres of arts specific teachers (band, chorus, etc) who visit different schools on different days of the week. We need to think about extended day instruction and weekend, summer and vacation classes that award credit! So much can be accomplished by just looking at the school day in new ways and these can be accomplished without huge spending increases. **We can make the time happen!**

Finally, dedicated funding for the arts must be reinstated. That money paid for outside arts organizations to work in the schools; for arts equipment and supplies; for the salaries of newly hired arts specialists. And it worked. Arts education grew while this funding was in place and it has stagnated since it disappeared. It is hardly a controversial issue. Parents support arts education and principals preferred a dedicated arts budget line. Let's support those parents and principals and give children arts opportunities to which they are entitled. **Dedicate funding for the arts!**

We are living in a time that values and rewards individuals who bring innovation and creativity to their work. They are the key citizens of tomorrow. An education system that graduates these individuals should be our primary goal. The arts – and what they teach and the habits they form – help to create these individuals. We can no longer educate the citizens of the twenty-first century without providing them the benefits of a strong, sequential and rigorous arts education. For the sake of our children and the future of our society, that should be a goal we can all support.

We look forward to seeing a response from the Chancellor as a continued demonstration of this commitment to the arts for all of our students. The Committee remains at the service of the Panel on Educational Policy and the Chancellor and looks forward to our continued and shared work.

j.mugivan@yahoo.com



Winner of the 2009 George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language



[Susan notes: Many good points. Here's a simple one we can ask anyone who claims educators wrote these standards and curriculum: Are these "educators" teachers who have spent at least five years in a classroom and are familiar with developmentally appropriate instruction and learning theory? Give us the list of those who designed the curriculum, materials and evaluations along with their credentials as classroom teachers.]

Submitted to New York State Senate but not published 11/19/2013



Dear Senator Martins,

- Home
Books
Button Up the Tests
Cartoons
Commentary
Common Core State [sic] Standards
Duncanisms
Gerald Bracey tributes
Militarization of Our Schools
Notable Quotes
Outrages
Outrages of the Day
Research that Counts
Resisters' Letters
RTTT & NCLB
Outrages
Stupid Test Items
The Eggplant
Yahoo Good News!
State News
Vocabulary: The Great Word Catalogue
World of Opportunity
Write to Susan

Senator Jack Martins
New York State Senate
Albany, N.Y.

Re: Common Core Hearings at Mineola High School
And the Protection of Children's Data

After listening to your extraordinary hearings at Mineola, I am convinced that we will need to start all over.

Like the story of the blind men trying to describe an elephant by holding a different part of its anatomy, the numerous issues and concerns make it obvious that no care was invested in a process that usually takes three years with close observation and input from actual teachers and administrators in the classroom.

This is an issue that directly impact the safety and emotional well being of all students, particularly early childhood, and the integrity of the educational system, as outlined recently in a letter by the Catholic Scholars: letter to the Bishops.

EVALUATIONS

The evaluation of students, mistakenly called "assessments", needs to be revisited while we return to the excellent New York State curriculum that was recently in place. Teachers and students are unable to use this data for their own growth and understanding, or receive it in a timely manner. One suggestion was to have testing on alternate years, which could offset the costs of being able to provide testing questions and answers for our own enlightenment and legitimacy.

These evaluations will add to the costs exponentially as Common Core proponents look to the use of computers in the future.

At your hearings, we learned of the recent study indicating the severe costs to economically challenged communities due to the Federal government's unfunded mandates in the Race to the Top (RTTT) program. It was indicated that the community of Rockland County foresees an increase over four years of \$11,000,000 with a meager distribution of \$400,000 from RTTT.

Commissioner King indicated that it was federal law that permits the schools to be governed by the States, when, in fact, it is by default in the Constitution that mandates States control of education and not the Federal government.

Another issue of concern is that parents who refuse to permit their children to be exposed to this questionable testing will cause their excellent local schools to be labeled in danger of failing, which would lead to State Control and the advent of new charter schools on these sites.

MATERIALS

Commissioner King indicated that resources are being provided to the schools, but they have the option of not using them. This may be the most pernicious problem with the Common Core, since testing questions are drawn from the materials which are the costliest component of the Common Core regime. Who controls the resources control the "evaluations" of both students and teachers and these "resources" crowd out good instruction.

The Commissioner indicated that these publishers will provide informational texts materials when, in fact, the research from their own Common Core indicates that publishers continue to dumb down the textbooks that they produce and provide excerpts from texts about numerous children with emotional stress creating an atmosphere of questionable social engineering both in literature and testing. Teachers become dependent on the "resources" provided by the State's publishers in the absence of authentic literacy materials and expect that they will appear on the annual testing "evaluations."

The Common Core Research for English Language Arts (ELA) & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects indicates that:

"There is also evidence that current standards, curriculum and instructional practices have not done enough to foster the independent reading of complex texts so crucial for college and career readiness, particularly in the case of informational texts." (Appendix A)

Of major concern is that time and money is being spent by municipalities for "staff development" surrounding these resources that are "not required" and are untried and unproven, as indicated by the local school board representative from Port Washington.

Those who created the curriculum and materials were said to be "educators" by the Commissioner. I am not certain what that term means. Are these teachers that have spent at least five years in a classroom and are familiar with developmentally appropriate instruction and learning theory?

Senator Martins, you need to get a list of those that designed the curriculum, materials and evaluations along with their credentials as classroom teachers.

DATA PRIVACY

I am particularly concerned that the privacy of students has been diminished by Federal mandates permitting children's data across the nation to be available to one outside economic entity. Besides testing scores, this entity will create a behavioral profile, which will include student and family social status and behavioral missteps.

Currently, the Clinton Foundation is creating a "digital badge" which will follow workers and those in education from cradle to grave, as they look for economic opportunities in the future.

SUMMARY

The elephant in the room, if I may return to the above mentioned metaphor, is the role of the publishing companies and the economic impact that they have in producing the materials for those program. Already we have seen major flaws and mistakes in their books and their inappropriate testing materials for children below 2nd grade.

I have seen math books now expecting children to round to the nearest five "5" as well as the nearest "0". This may be useful for Walmart clerks, but not scientists.

I have seen Social Studies books speak of the Bill of Rights created in the Constitution without identifying them or their importance to individual freedoms.

I have seen workbooks micromanage with reductionist precision to the point that the subject cannot be perceived holistically and become boring and unbearable to the students. In many ways this is due to the market forces of the publishers where children are being prepared for multiple choice testing in kindergarten.

In summary we should take Regent Meryl Tisch at her word when she indicates that such issues will receive a fair hearing. Such a hearing will require a moratorium on this program for a few years until we can begin an entirely new review which includes parents and classroom teachers in the various municipalities across the State.

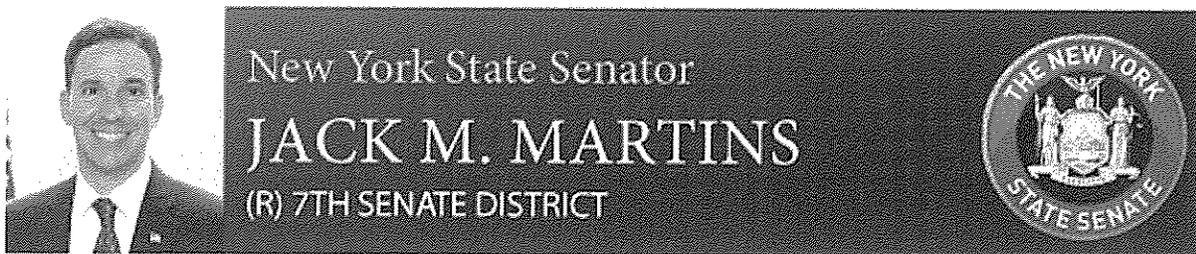
Sincerely,

— Joseph Mugivan, MS, Educational Administration PD

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To ensure delivery of emails to your inbox, please add martins@nysenate.gov to your email address book.



Dear Friends,

You may recall that I recently called for the resignation of New York State Education Commissioner, Dr. John King. The initiatives he has undertaken in his brief tenure as Commissioner of the State Education Department, including his roll-out of the Common Core curriculum, testing, teacher evaluations, and gathering of student data, are shaping up to be among the most controversial issues I've ever dealt with as a public servant. It's easy to see why. These changes have created confusion among parents, anxiety for our children, and put life-long educators at odds with the department of education in Albany. This was only exacerbated when he cancelled town hall meetings on the issue.

So on Wednesday, November 13, I moderated a forum, coordinated with the 15 school districts from our Seventh Senate District, at Mineola High School. Dr. King attended and fielded questions from parents, educators, school board members and even students on the Common Core standards and rollout, teacher evaluations, testing, and student privacy. We had more than 800 in the audience and over 2,000 watching on a live feed via the internet.

Reporting the event's conclusions is a challenge best summed up by a letter I received from an attendee who said it was like blind men trying to explain an elephant by describing just one body part at a time. The issues we're facing in education in New York are multidimensional and require a holistic approach to appreciate and address them.

It's not just the rollout of the Common Core and its impact on students

and teachers.

It's not just the teacher evaluation system that has created conflict and anxiety without any apparent purpose or meaningful result.

It's not just the overreliance on testing and its impact on a child's educational experience and the teacher's role as educator.

It's not just the concern of parents for the protection of their child's privacy.

It's all of these things individually and collectively and much more. It speaks volumes to the reality that we are moving too quickly with no apparent purpose other than the claim that it will all be better when we get "there", wherever "there" is.

The writer went on to conclude "that no care was invested in a process" that should have been conducted with "years of close observation and input from actual teachers and administrators in the classroom." I agree.

Most importantly, we are left asking the most basic of questions: How does any of this improve the educational experience of our children?

In theory, as the Commissioner explained, it may.

In reality, as we heard from parents, students, teachers, and educators, it has not and will more than likely have just the opposite effect. It's seems wiser then to reevaluate these initiatives as a whole and take the time to phase in only the parts that work.

While we all want higher and more rigorous standards for our children, it must be rolled out gradually, allowing teachers to properly prepare and students the advantage of growing with the new curriculum. Judging by the temperature I took in that auditorium, parents and educators are more than up to the task should Dr. King care to work with them and I hope he will.

While I feel the evening was productive in identifying these issues, I

know full well that political pressure will ultimately be necessary to institute any changes. The powers that be seem entrenched in their position however wrongheaded they may be.

Which brings me to the title of this column: "Where Is the Students' Lobbyist?"

You may remember that a few years ago during his "State of the State," Governor Cuomo remarked how students were the only group in schools that didn't have a lobbyist and valiantly volunteered to take on that responsibility. He recognized then that our children had to be protected from special interests more intent on exploiting education for gain, than furthering learning and life opportunities for students. He pledged to do so.

But he's been notably silent.

Let's hope for our children's sake that he has not abandoned his post as the students' lobbyist and that he's not counting on blind men to tell him what the elephant looks like.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack M. Martins". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first letter "J" is large and loops back. The "M" and "A" are also prominent. The signature ends with a long horizontal stroke.

JACK M. MARTINS

Senator

Albany Address:
946 Legislative Office Building



Class Size Matters

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phone: 212- 674- 7320

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How high-stakes testing is unreliable and undermines the quality of education in NYC Schools

Testimony to the NYC Council Education Committee

Leonie Haimson, Class Size Matters

November 25, 2013

Thank you for holding these hearings today, Chair Jackson. Over the last few years, the state and the city have increased their emphasis on high-stakes exams, just as the NY State Education Department has shown itself to be unable to produce a decent, reliable exam with a credible scoring system in at least ten years.

That's why there have been wild gyrations from year to year in the percent of students making the grade. For example, 77% of NYS students were at level 3 or 4 in English in 2009; this dropped to 53% in 2010 and 31% in 2013..

For nearly a decade, from at least 2003-2010, there was rampant test score inflation, with many of the same state and city officials who are now proclaiming that the scores are too low and our schools are failing claiming with equal conviction that the earlier, rising test scores showed that NYC schools were improving rapidly.

The state test score bubble allowed NYC Mayor Bloomberg renew mayoral control and win a 3rd term by maintaining that his high-stakes testing regime was working, when the reality was that, according to everyone who was paying attention, the exams had gotten overly predictable and the scoring far too easy over time.

At the same time as the state exams showed huge increases, scores on the more reliable national exams called the NAEPs showed little progress. In fact, [NYC made smaller gains](#) on the NAEPs than nearly any other large school district in the country during these years.¹

The last two years of exams created by Pearson have been especially disastrous; from the [multiple errors in questions and scoring](#) on the 2012 exams (including the [infamous Pineapple passage](#), which we wrote about first on the NYC parent blog) to the [epic fail of this year's tests](#)

¹Class Size Matters, "NYC Achievement Gains Compared to Other Large Cities since 2003," January 2012, <http://www.classsizematters.org/nyc-second-to-last-among-cities-in-student-progress-on-the-naeps-since-2003/>.

– which were too long, riddled with ambiguous questions and replete with commercial logos for products like Mug Root Beer.²

Top students were unable to finish these shoddy exams, and many left in tears and had anxiety attacks. To make things worse, the exams featured reading passages drawn straight from Pearson [textbooks](#) which were assigned to some students in the state and not to others.³

In fact, the cut scores for proficiency were set so high that parents of students in districts on Long Island and Westchester -- where more than 90% graduate from high school in four years, go onto four year college where they do very well -- were told that most of their children also failed the exams and would not be college and career ready. These parents have clearly said they don't believe these results, they don't trust SED and they don't want their kids discouraged by their results on exams that are so flawed and have so little credibility.

The truth is that the new cut scores that determine the different proficiency levels on the state exams – which decide how many kids “pass” or are at Level 3 and 4 -- are arbitrary and set by Commissioner King. He can set them to create the illusion that our schools are rapidly improving, as the previous Commissioner did, or he can set them to make it look that our public schools are failing, as Commissioner King now is doing, to bolster support for his other policies – including the Common Core, student personal data-collection and sharing with vendors, test-based teacher evaluation and charter expansion.

The primary evidence that Commissioner King now bases his overly-harsh cut scores upon is that the results are mirror the percent of students who test “proficient” or above on the NAEPs. Yet while the NAEPs are reliable to discern trends in test scores, because they remain relatively stable over time, the cut scores that determine the different achievement levels are VERY controversial. Even the National Academy of Sciences has questioned the setting of the NAEP proficiency levels and points out:

Just one third of American fourth graders were said to be proficient in reading by NAEP in the mid-1990s at the very time that international assessments of fourth-grade reading judged American students to rank Number Two in the world.⁴

Though Deputy Chancellor Suransky has claimed he has added funds for intervention services and support for struggling students the opposite has happened. Class sizes have gone up

² See: NYC Public School Parents, “NYS Educators agree: Flawed, confusing and misleading exams,” April 18, 2012, <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2012/04/nys-educators-agree-flawed-confusing.html>. See also: Leonie Haimson, “The Lessons of Pineapplegate,” *WNYC Schoolbook*, June 6, 2012; NYC Public School Parents, “This year’s NYS/Pearson ELA exams: an Epic Fail,” April 17, 2013, <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2013/04/looking-for-feedback-on-this-years-ela.html>.

³ Kathleen Porter-Magee, “The problem with Pearson-designed tests that threatens thousands of scores,” *Washington Post Answer Sheet*, May 6, 2013.

⁴ James Harvey, executive director of the National Superintendents Roundtable, “NAEP: A flawed benchmark producing the same old story,” *Washington Post Answer Sheet*, November 4, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/naep-a-flawed-benchmark-producing-the-same-old-story/2011/11/03/gIQAbnomM_blog.html.

sharply, for the sixth year in a row, and in the early grades are now the largest in 15 years.⁵ Schools are now spending one day per week of the 37 ½ minutes meant for small group instruction for struggling students instead on scoring tests and prepping for the teacher evaluation system. Some schools are even closing for half days to spend even more time on these purposes. None of this is helping kids learn.

Teacher evaluation based on value-added test scores is just as unreliable – even if one believes that test scores were the best evidence for a good teacher (which I don't)--with huge volatility from one year to the next.⁶

The school progress reports also swing widely from year to year as they are based in one year's changes in test scores – which research shows is 40-80% random. In fact James Liebman, who first devised the school grading system for DOE, promised that the grades would soon be based on three years of test scores but reneged on his promise soon after.⁷

DOE officials are very aware these metrics are unreliable, but like the teacher evaluation system, it allows them to brand more schools as failing or ineffective – to more easily close them. .

So why are NYSED and DOE officials determined to prove that more than 69% of the students throughout New York State are failing? This is the [Shock Doctrine](#) at work.⁸ Naomi Klein has observed that when you scare people enough, it is easier to persuade them to allow you to make whatever radical changes you want, since the status quo will be perceived as so disastrous.

In the case of SED and DOE, they want to convince parents that their corporate agenda, will somehow improve the quality of education in our state, even though there is little or no evidence to back up any of these policies.

Rick Hess, the conservative commentator at Education Week, revealed the motives behind the promoters of these exams in a column called the "[Common Core Kool-aid](#)":

First, politicians will actually embrace the Common Core assessments and then will use them to set cut scores that suggest huge numbers of suburban schools are failing. Then, parents and community members who previously liked their schools are going to believe the assessment results rather than their own lying eyes...

⁵ Class Size Matters, *Class Sizes Increase for the Sixth Year in a Row; Including Data Analysis and Charts*, November 18, 2013 at <http://www.classsizematters.org/class-sizes-increase-for-the-sixth-year-in-a-row-class-size-report/>; see also Rachel Monahan, "New York City class sizes average 25 children after growing six years", *NY Daily News*, Nov. 18, 2013.

⁶ Gary Rubinstein, "Analyzing Released NYC Value-Added Data Part 1-6," Feb. 26, 2012 <http://garyrubinstein.teachforus.org/2012/02/26/analyzing-released-nyc-value-added-data-part-1/>

⁷ See Beth Fertig, *Why cant U teach me 2 read? Three Students and a Mayor Put Our Schools to the Test*, Macmillan, September 15, 2009, p. 121 .

⁸ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.

Finally, newly convinced that their schools stink, parents and voters will embrace "reform." However, most of today's proffered remedies--including test-based teacher evaluation, efforts to move "effective" teachers to low-income schools, charter schooling, and school turnarounds--don't have a lot of fans in the suburbs or speak to the things that suburban parents are most concerned about....Common Core advocates now evince an eerie confidence that they can scare these voters into embracing the "reform" agenda.⁹

The Common Core is similarly flawed; the two “architects” who were hired by the Gates Foundation, David Coleman and Jason Zimba, neither one of whom ever taught K12 a day in their lives. There was little or no input from working classroom teachers or parents but plenty from the testing companies.

The philosophy behind the Common Core which is the same standardization for all – is bound to fail; and punish those kids, teachers and students most who are most at risk.

Joel Klein, who wrote an oped for Rupert Murdoch’s NY Post in support of the new exams, appropriately entitled the [The Good News in Lower Test Scores](#), now heads Amplify, Rupert Murdoch’s online learning division, which is the largest contractor for inBloom.¹⁰

For Klein and Murdoch, the drastic fall in state test scores is indeed good news, because it will make districts desperate to improve results and help them market their computer tablets, data systems, and software products to make more profit.

In the case of Pearson, the world’s largest educational corporation, more schools will now be convinced to buy their textbooks, workbooks, and test prep materials, as [900 NYC schools have now done](#) – in hope that their students may do better on the Pearson-state exams, that may even include the same reading passages as happened this year.¹¹

To achieve their ideological ends, politicians, corporations, and educrats are not only willing to define your children in terms of their test scores, but also to redefine them as failures – to help them implement their mechanistic, reductionist, and ultimately depersonalized vision of education.

⁹ Rick Hess, “The Common Core Kool-Aid,” *Education Week*, November 30, 2012, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2012/11/the_common_core_kool-aid.html.

¹⁰ Joel Klein, “The good news in lower test scores,” *New York Post*, August 7, 2013, <http://nypost.com/2013/08/07/the-good-news-in-lower-test-scores/>.

¹¹ “State Plans Record-Keeping Changes for Schools,” *NY1 News*, November 24, 2013, <http://www.ny1.com/content/news/education/199276/state-plans-record-keeping-changes-for-schools>.

Honorable Robert Jackson
Chair, Education Committee
New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

November 24, 2013

Dear Chairman Jackson,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on the impact of standardized testing on DOE students (Resolution 1394). I strongly urge the members of the City Council to vote affirmatively on this resolution.

I am a parent of two children, one in public middle school in Manhattan and another who just graduated from public high school in Manhattan. I have been an active member at my daughters' schools having served as a PTA officer, an SLT member, and a volunteer environmental educator. I am also the current President of the Community Education Council District 2, although this testimony does not reflect the opinion of the Council.

I recently had the opportunity to see a presentation by Dr. William Reese, Professor of Educational Policy Studies and History at University of Wisconsin – Madison. The presentation was a fascinating study on how this nation has been obsessed with testing and quantifying student learning since the 1800's and how politics played a role in education policy making. It was quite disheartening to learn that what we are experiencing today with regards to testing and quantifying learning is nothing new: we have been at it for more than a century with the same arguments on both sides. However, with so many advances in every facet of our society in the last century, I certainly hope we can move forward on this controversial topic. I see no reason why we cannot develop a system of assessments – for students, teachers, administrators, schools, school districts and the nation – that truly reflect the nuances and complexity of a good education.

I am not against testing so long as tests provide useful information for parents and teachers (but I am highly skeptical of the value of multiple choice questions on which I believe critical thinkers tend not to do well). Unfortunately the standardized tests of today do not provide useful information to me as a parent. This is largely because these tests have become so high stakes they can no longer serve as useful indicators of student learning. The only conclusion I can draw from my daughters' test scores is that they know how to take these standardized tests relatively well and/or my daughters' teachers prepared them well.

Even if the tests were not high stakes, the timing of the release of the scores as well as the details of the results render these tests rather meaningless. Scores are released months after my children take the tests and parents are given only the raw scores and the "levels", but not the detailed information on what questions they missed. These factors make it impossible for parents to know how they can help their children in a timely manner and certainly for teachers to adjust their teaching.

Furthermore, these standardized tests often appear to be culturally biased. I once read an ELA test passage about a farm life. For many children in New York City I would imagine such a passage would have no personal connection, putting them at a disadvantage compared to those students who have the

resources to experience a farm in real life. For mathematics, the test questions often seem more appropriate as testing English comprehension rather than a mathematical concept. Thus in New York City a significant number of students who are English Language Learners are judged on their English language proficiency even in the math tests. I understand the tests are administered by the State and we cannot require the State to have a different version of the tests in NYC. However, when making policies, these factors must be considered and weighed appropriately.

For these reasons, I personally have not spent much time discussing the standardized tests with my children or paid much attention to their test scores. Instead I communicate with my teachers frequently, talk to my children about school and pay attention to their work to assess their learning. The more significant impact I have witnessed with the standardized tests has to do with the broader issue of how the test scores fit into the accountability scheme.

Student promotion decisions, teacher evaluations, school progress reports, and principals' careers all depend entirely or largely on these test scores. I will not belabor the detrimental effects the use of test scores have had on students, teachers, principals, and curricula. Many students are extremely stressed before and during the tests. Their middle or high school choices are partially determined by the test scores. Teachers spend more time preparing for the tests and feel devalued because the only thing that matters are the ELA and Math test scores. Principals are afraid of the school progress report, 85 % of which depend on test scores. Three consecutive Cs or an F would lead to school closure. Despite many advocates and experts telling the Department of Education that the tests were not designed for these uses these policies continue to this day.

With standardized tests still extremely high stakes, the Common Core implementation has led to further narrowing of the curriculum. Setting aside the fact that some educators question the value of the Common Core, the test driven implementation has certainly made this initiative deeply troublesome. Today teaching and learning seem to be only about reading, analyzing, writing, and calculating. Even though critical thinking skills so central to the Common Core can and should be taught in all subjects – the arts is a powerful way of teaching critical thinking – the high stakes associated with tests and the results of the first “Common Core aligned” tests in 2013 have made it impossible for our educators to be creative and innovative in their teaching.

The obsession with quantifying learning coupled with the zest for accountability has created an environment in which those aspects of education that can be measured are valued while those qualitative and hard to measure aspects are ignored or worse, devalued. The policy makers at all levels of government are blinded by the desire to quantify educational outcome (presumably because they only know how to speak in corporate-speak), they have turned everything into something that can be measured (have you seen the principal's compliance check list?), not realizing that just because you can measure it does not mean what you are measuring is meaningful.

In the process these policy makers lost sight of what constitutes a good education. Reading, writing and basic mathematical skills are all very important. However, there is much more to a good education than ELA and Math. Civic responsibility, knowing one's place in the world, compassion, collaboration, creativity, inquisitiveness, curiosity, and passion for learning are all critically important but cannot be easily tested or measured. A good teacher can provide all of these attributes in addition to teaching how to read, write and calculate. A future citizen of our society must also acquire all these attributes in addition to proficiency in ELA and Math.

Our children, teachers, administrators and schools cannot be assessed by one measure – standardized tests. Such simplistic and misguided accountability system does terrible injustice to our education system and prevents us from doing the real work of educating our future generation. Please pass this resolution so that we can begin real teaching.

Thank you.

Shino Tanikawa

118 Sullivan Street

New York, NY 10012

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KEN COHEN

Address: 1065 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS

I represent: NAACP NYS CONFERENCE

Address: 1065 AVENUE OF AMERICAS STE 300

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

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Date: 11/25/2013

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARTHA KESSLER

Address: 216 FIFTH ST #5D

I represent: C. P. A. C.

Address: Tweed Hill

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 925 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Doug Israel

Address: 266

I represent: The Center for Arts Education

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 1394

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeff Nichols

Address: 500 West 111th St. #3C

I represent: Change The Stakes

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 10911 & 925 Res. No. 1394

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Richard Muntell, VP for Middle School

Address: 52 B'way NYC

I represent: YFT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Max Ahmed

Address: _____

I represent: The New York Immigration Coalition

Address: 137-139 West 25th St.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Simone D'Souza

Address: 130 West 15th St, NY NY 10011

I represent: Dept of Education

Address: 52 Chambers St NY NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul L King

Address: 52 Chambers

I represent: New York City Dept of Ed

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dennis M. Walcott

Address: Chancellor

I represent: NYC Schools

Address: 52 Chambers

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. OVERSIGHT HEARING - IMPACT OF Res. No. STANDARDIZED TESTING
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ABJA MIDHA

Address: 235 LINCOLN PL, BROOKLYN, NY 11217

I represent: ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NY

Address: 157 W. 30th St, 5th floor, NY, NY 10

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Symone A. Souza

Address: Executive Director

I represent: Office of Research, Accountability

Address: 17th St, NYC

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul King

Address: Executive Director

I represent: Office of Arts Education

Address: and special projects

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 1394

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/24/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Kupper

Address: 324 Sackett St. # Bt

I represent: CCL District 15

Address: Livingston St. Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Khani, Asst. Director Political Affairs

Address: 40 Rector St. NYC

I represent: Council of School Supervisors & Administrators

Address: 40 Rector St. NYC

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Steven Tennen

Address: 520 8th Ave. NYC 10018

I represent: ArtConnection

Address: 520 8th Ave NYC 10018

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Mugivan

Address: PO Box 501 Port Washington NY 11050

I represent: Advocate for Healthy Education

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molea Flavin

Address: 105 East 22nd Street NYC

I represent: Citizens Committee for Children

Address: same as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 1374
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: MARMA FINE

Address: _____

I represent: Time Out From Testing

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: JERROLD ROSS

Address: ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

I represent: ARTS EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms