

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Education on Resolution 1155

Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director of the

Catholic Community Relations Council

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FOR THE RECORD

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Good afternoon Chairman Jackson and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education. I am Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director of the Catholic Community Relations Council ("CCRC"), a not for profit corporation established by the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn to handle local legislative and policy issues in New York City. I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of Resolution 1155.

This Resolution calls upon the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation that would permit houses of worship access to New York City school property for religious meetings. We believe that it is a matter of fundamental fairness that public school facilities should be made available to religious congregants for meetings and services in the same manner that they are made available for other civic groups. Advocating such an approach is consistent with the policy that the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn have embraced over the years; namely allowing the City of New York to use our facilities for such purposes as community board meetings, polling sites for elections and other events when such a request has been made by City government.

In 2011, the New York City Board of Education received over 120,000 applications for use of their school's space. Although less than 5% of the requests were from religious organizations, the Board denied such requests.

On June, 29, 2012, the United States District Court ruled against the Board of Education finding, in part, that the issue here is "not the accommodation of religion, but rather the burdening of religion" in that due to the expensive and crowded real estate market in New York City "eviction from the Board's schools would amount to a concrete loss of religious freedom."

One of the Board's contentions was that allowing the use of space to religious organizations violated the Federal Establishment clause, implying that by allowing such meetings to occur the Board was favoring certain religious beliefs. The Court found otherwise stating that "(t) he fact that a youth basketball program holds tournaments in a school at the same time that a church holds Sunday services there, both pursuant to a neutral policy that promotes the general welfare of the community, does not suggest to the informed objective observer that the school is endorsing religion just as it does not suggest the school is endorsing basketball."

The judicial branch of our government has ruled in support of the houses of worship on this important issue. It is now time for the legislative branch of our government to act.

Accordingly, we strongly support the City Council in promoting this legislation and urge that the State Legislature and the Governor follow their lead.

Thank you

I am writing in support of the NYC City Council resolution calling for an immediate stop for all stand-alone field tests. As a NYC teacher I can certainly verify that students are overwhelmed with testing by this time in the school year. Our third, fourth and fifth grade students spent hours and hours of class time getting ready for the April tests and then hours upon hours taking the tests. They do not need to spend more time taking tests. The fourth grade students are even now getting ready for their science tests. Remember we are discussing 8, 9, and 10 year olds. They need no more stress or loss of class time to testing.

Lisa North, Teacher PS 3 Brooklyn

I strongly support the resolution under consideration concerning stand-alone field testing.

Stoppage of the June field tests will end the charade that this procedure is needed to ensure the development of good instruments for next April's exams.

Field testing in the public schools allows publishers like Pearson to do market research for free on the products it will sell us in the future. In this case, the New York State Education Department (SED) is letting Pearson try out test items in June to see how samples of students react to them.

Are the items too hard or too easy? Are they confusing or un-discriminating? Publishers gather statistics on how each item performs—not to measure student achievement—but to evaluate their potential for use on subsequent operational exams, like the ones that will be given next year.

The fatal flaw inherent in the stand-alone approach is that the information obtained on each item is unreliable. And items are the bricks used to build tests. Constructing exams based on weak data makes them meaningless. The problem is glaring when tests are used to reach high-stakes decisions, in such matters as student promotion, teacher effectiveness and school ratings.

Why are the data unreliable? Because students taking the field tests know the results have no consequences for them. The results don't count, it's June and students have been battered by tests all year. They are not motivated to do well on the stand-alone field tests. The data they generate on each item are not predictive of how students will respond to the same items when they appear on tests that count.

This is not a theory. The English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests that students took just four weeks ago were developed from last June's (2012) stand-alone field tests. Reports from teachers and parents indicated that students couldn't finish these exams; that the items were extremely hard and beyond the grade level of the students taking them; and less time was allotted to each item than the year before. If students had taken the June 2012 stand-alone field tests seriously, these shortcomings would have been identified and the problems would have been addressed.

Now, SED wants us to embark on the same excursion we took last year—replicating stand-alone field test procedures that just failed us miserably, while the evidence of that failure is still warm.

It has tapped no fewer than 1,282 New York City public schools for field testing. **1,282!!** That will involve spending more than just one hour taking the field tests. The effort and disruption involved in these assignments add up to sacrificing at least a full school day—to say nothing of the vast costs in lost teacher salary and learning opportunities.

And beyond perpetuating the same kind of damaging high-stakes testing (thereby precluding better assessment techniques from emerging), continuing the stand-alone field tests imposes ethical questions that SED ignores. Why aren't children treated as subjects in a commercial research and development project and paid for their time? And why are parents kept in the dark about the field tests—keeping them uninformed about procedures they might otherwise object to?

In sum, stand-alone field tests yield shaky data, rendering tests that rely upon the information invalid and supporting the conclusion that this approach to field testing is a non-starter. Without doubt, halting the June stand-alone field tests is the right action for the City Council to take.

May 21, 2013-Statement by Fred Smith, City Council Hearing on Resolution Calling for New York State Department of Education to Immediately Stop All Stand-Alone Field Testing for Students.

Fred Smith, a testing specialist and consultant, retired as an administrative analyst for the New York City public schools. He is a member of Change the Stakes, a parent advocacy group.