

What Do We Want For Our Schools?

A New Framework for Public Education in NYS: Building a Vision that Serves ALL Students



Since the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and the test-driven accountability system mandated by Race to the Top, New York State parents, educators, school board members, and communities have come together to voice their concerns. Hundreds of thousands of students have and will continue to opt out of state tests until their concerns are addressed. Until New York State begins to embrace a vision of public education that prioritizes child-centered and developmentally appropriate learning standards and assessments, research and evidence based practices and policies, equitable resources and opportunities, and an accountability system that supports rather than punishes, the opt out movement will continue.

While by no means exhaustive, the following is a list of what NYS Allies for Public Education believes all schools must have in order to foster creative, critically thinking, confident, well-rounded, independent, self-motivated, culturally competent, and well-prepared students who can work cooperatively and excel post-high school, whether they choose to attend college or pursue a vocation. We call on all aspects of public education to be rooted in ethical practices and democratic decision making.

Until the majority of these criteria are met and until students are provided with equitable learning environments and opportunities, any and all discussions of closing the opportunity gap, preparing students for a competitive global economy, and “career and college readiness” are disingenuous. We know that an accountability system based on test scores and “rigorous” learning standards have not led to increased student achievement, especially in schools starved of resources. Furthermore, a misguided focus on test scores distracts from critical conversations about what all students need to be successful and about the goals of public education.

It is our contention that we must reframe the concept of accountability in New York State to assess our student’s learning conditions, the resources made available to them, and a school’s ability to educate and meet the needs of the whole child - something that cannot be reduced to a data point. In the face of grossly disparate learning conditions, the use of test scores to assess the efficacy of teachers, schools, and administrators lacks validity, and most importantly, hurts students.

The following suggestions are the building blocks for an equitable public education system in which ALL students can succeed:

Standards

- Learning standards must serve as a guide to what all children should develop toward. These standards must be based on developmental norms rather than a systematic back-mapping of any given college and career readiness benchmark.
- Learning standards must be created by NYS classroom educators and content area specialists experienced in the grade level for which they are creating standards, with feedback from parents, community members, and where appropriate, students.
- Standards must specify at what level of difficulty a student is expected to demonstrate proficiency (i.e. lexile level) on state tests.
- Standards, including lexile benchmarks, should be based on peer reviewed and evidence based research for each grade level. While we cannot expect standardized development toward any given standard or benchmark, these standards should serve as a guide to what skills and concepts are taught at each grade level.
- Standards must be broad enough to allow local teachers, as professionals, to determine which methodology, content, and instructional practices and assessments will best suit the needs of the communities and students they serve.
- Standards must include fine and gross motor skills including handwriting.
- The State must recognize that play is a well researched and critical aspect of learning for students, especially but not only in grades K-2. Therefore, standards must broadly address play skills to ensure that schools allocate instructional time for self-selected and guided play, particularly in the early grades.
- Standards in all grades must address cultural competencies.

Curriculum & Pedagogy

- Curriculum and pedagogy should focus on academic, social and emotional learning for all students.
- Curriculum and pedagogy should prepare students to become critical-thinkers and active participants in a democratic society.
- School districts must be given adequate funding to create or purchase culturally relevant curriculum that meets the needs of the communities and students they serve.
- All schools must have dedicated funding for curriculum-based field trips and project based, experiential learning.

- Music, art, physical education, and technology should be integrated into the curriculum for all students in grades K-12.
- All schools must offer at least one consistent foreign language in grades K-12.
- Any state-wide digital learning platforms must be evidence based, piloted, and studied for both efficacy and safety before being implemented.
- All high schools must offer advanced mathematics and science courses as well as advanced electives in all disciplines.
- All schools' curricula should offer significant opportunities for students to exercise choice and direct aspects of their own learning.

Assessment

- Any federally mandated statewide assessments must be created by New York State classroom educators. This includes test question construction and reading passage selection. In a system that includes local assessment, classroom educators **MUST** have the primary role in constructing or selecting the assessments.
- Tests must be criterion referenced rather than norm referenced and results must be given back within 4 weeks of administration.
- College and Career readiness benchmarks aligned with test proficiency must be aligned with strong indicators of post-high school success that have been vetted for racial, cultural, and socioeconomic bias.
- Any federally mandated statewide assessments must be no longer than one day per subject with time limits established by a committee of classroom educators experienced in the grade level for which the assessment has been developed. Time limits must be based on grade level expectations for time on task.
- The misuse of assessment data must stop. Statewide exams must be decoupled from any high stakes including but not limited to teacher and principal evaluations, grounds for school takeover or closure, use as admittance criteria to selective schools, promotion, programs, and retention.
- On any statewide test, all test content, reading passages, and questions must align to the grade level benchmarks and lexile levels for the grade in which it is being administered.
- Test scores and high stakes exit exams must not be the only pathway to graduation. Students must have the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in other ways such as portfolios and interviews.
- Regents exams must be scheduled in such a way so as to ensure that no student must take more than one Regent exam per day.

- Assessments must be subject to full transparency. This includes the annual release of comprehensive technical reports that provide transparency on specific items.
- All parents and guardians must be notified of their right to refuse standardized tests for their child(ren). Notification must be provided in the parent or guardian's native language.

Resources

- New York State must fully and equitably fund our public schools.
- Reasonable class sizes caps (for example, 18 students in K-3, 23-25 in other grades) must be used in aid and funding formulas as the basis for school aid determination.
- All schools must have at least one full time nurse, social worker, and security guard/safety officer. All security guard/safety officers must receive crisis intervention and cultural competency training.
- All schools must have a well-resourced library and a full time librarian.
- All schools must have adequate counseling support provided by a psychologist (as determined by the overall number of students, the number of students with special needs, and the level of poverty a school is experiencing.)
- All schools must have up to date technological infrastructure and resources. State aid and funds for these resources should not be contingent upon schools increasing their capacity to administer computer-based assessments.
- In conjunction with parents, educators, school board members, and community members, the Board of Regents should develop a framework for what every public school in NYS must have in order to ensure equity and student success. This framework should help drive the State's accountability system as well as its funding.
- In Pre-K and in grades K-6, all students must have at least 60 minutes of recess per day in addition to the federally mandated 120 minutes of physical education per week.
- All students must be guaranteed at least 30 minutes for lunch. This time may not be used for instructional purposes.
- ALL teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals must receive training in cultural competency, crisis intervention, and restorative justice practices.
- Mandatory common planning time should be provided for general education, special education and ENL teachers, and intervention specialists who share students.

- New York State must prioritize the recruitment and retention of teachers from diverse backgrounds that reflect the students they serve, are trained in a fully accredited education program, and have completed a full course of student teaching with a trained mentor.
- All school districts must offer a strong teacher mentoring program to help new teachers navigate their first few years of service.
- Schools must provide access to medical and dental services as well as high quality nutrition for ALL students who need them.
- All families must have access to fully funded, high quality Pre-Kindergarten.

Special Education

- The role of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) must be restored and allowed to drive instruction for the individual student and should be guided by the needs, interests & development of each student.
- The needs of the student must inform IEP goals rather than alignment to learning standards that are currently in flux.
- All special education teachers must receive training in evidence-based methodologies for teaching math and reading to struggling learners.
- All co-taught models must have a full time special education teacher.
- Students with disabilities must have access to pathways that lead to a diploma and provide access to vocational training that is aligned with student interest and strengths.
- Special education teachers must have time set aside on a weekly or daily basis to engage in differentiated curriculum work, intervention planning, communication with parents, and fulfillment of IEP and special education mandates.

Privacy – (adopted from The Parent Coalition for Student Privacy)

FIVE PRINCIPLES TO PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY

The Parent Coalition for Student Privacy believes that the following five principles should be incorporated in any law or policy regarding the protection of personal student data in grades preK-12. After students reach age 18, all these rights, including those related to notification and consent, should devolve to them:

- **Transparency:** Parents must be notified by their children’s school or district in advance of any disclosure of personal student information to any persons, companies or organizations outside of the school or district. *Once notified, parents to must be able to opt out of the disclosure of their child’s personal data. (added by NYSAPE)*

All disclosures to third parties should also require publicly available contracts and privacy policies that specify what types of data are to be disclosed for what purposes, and provide a date certain when the data will be destroyed.

- **No commercial uses:** Selling of personal student data and; or use for marketing purposes should be banned. ***NO advertising should be allowed on instructional software or websites*** assigned to students by their schools, since ads are a distraction from learning and serve no legitimate educational purpose. While some of the current bills ban “targeted” ads, others ban targeted ads except for those derived from a student’s one- time internet use. But how can any parent know whether an ad displayed to their children was based on data-mining their child a single time or over a longer period?
- **Security protections:** At minimum, there must be encryption of personal data at motion and at rest, required training for all individuals with access to personal student data, audit logs, and security audits by an independent auditor. Passwords should be protected in the same manner as all other personal student information.

There must be notification to parents of all breaches, and indemnification of the same.

No “anonymized” or “de-identified” student information should be disclosed without verifiable safeguards to ensure data cannot be easily re-identified.

- **Parental/ student rights:** NO re-disclosures by vendors or any other third parties to additional individuals, sub-contractors, or organizations should be allowed without parental notification and consent (or students, if they are 18 or older).

Parents must be allowed to see any data collected directly from their child by a school or a vendor given access through the school, delete the data if it is in error or is nonessential to the child’s transcript, and opt out of further collection, unless that data is part of their child’s educational records at school. Any data-mining for purpose of creating student profiles, even for educational purposes, must be done with full parental knowledge.

Parental consent must be required for disclosure of personal data, especially for highly sensitive information such as their child’s disabilities, health and disciplinary information.

- **Enforcement:** The law should specify fines if the school, district or third party violates the law, their contracts and/or privacy policies; with parents able to sue on behalf of their children’s rights as well. Without strong enforcement provisions, any law or policy protecting student privacy is likely to be ignored.

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