

S.AVE O.UR S.CHOOLS

Emergency Educational Action Plan to Address the 2010 Test Score Crisis

The release of the 2010 New York State reading and math test scores was a sobering moment for our city. While many parents, educators and testing experts raised concerns about the validity of the test score increases over the last few years, it was shocking to see their worst fears confirmed. As a result of NYS recalibrating the test scores to align with college-ready standards, citywide reading scores declined by 27 points, math scores went down 28 points, and the racial and income-based achievement gaps have grown. Only 13% of students with disabilities and 14% of English Language Learners scored proficient in English Language Arts (ELA). Tens of thousands of additional students are NOT on the road to college and career success. Compared to 2009:

- » **109,000 more students are NOT meeting standards in English Language Arts (ELA)**
- » **50,000 more students are significantly BELOW standards in ELA (scoring in Level 1)**
- » **364 more schools have 2/3 or more of their students NOT meeting standards in ELA**

The test score results demonstrate that the student learning gains claimed by the current city administration are highly exaggerated. As Dan Koretz, the Harvard professor whose study led to the recalibration of the tests, wrote to Commissioner Steiner in June, "...relatively little of the score gain on the New York 8th grade math test represented real, generalizable improvements in student performance" and "...in ELA as well, the apparent improvement in performance on the New York test appears to arise in substantial part from score inflation, a lowering of the standards, or both."

These scores have profound implications for the future of our public school system. We believe the NYC Department of Education (DoE) must implement policy changes to address the problems the test scores reflect and ensure all schools have the educational resources and strategies to become great schools that promote genuine student learning and put all students on track for success. We call upon the NYC Department of Education to:

1. Provide intensive interventions for all students who scored in Levels 1 and 2, including those now in high school.

Tens of thousands of struggling students should have been receiving additional services to enhance their learning. Some of these students are now in high school. The Department of Education must ensure that these students receive the necessary instructional and support services to foster student learning in a wide range of subjects within a rigorous and diverse curriculum. This means DoE should:

- Ensure that all students who scored in Level 1 or 2 receive Academic Intervention Services (AIS) from their school, including all incoming 9th graders who scored in Level 1 or 2 last year;
- Ensure that all Children First Networks include a full-time, trained Academic Intervention Specialist;
- Appoint a full-time director of Academic Intervention Services;
- Provide professional development and on-site support, including use of evidence-based intervention programs, to improve teachers' capacity to deliver effective differentiated instruction geared to each student's needs;
- Ensure small class size to allow for effective instruction for struggling students;
- Ensure that all ELL and Special Education students receive mandated services, in addition to AIS services;
- Ensure that all schools develop an educational intervention plan by October 15th or November 15th, depending on the number of students, for each child eligible to receive AIS;
- Ensure that all schools meet with every family whose child is eligible to receive AIS by October 15th to discuss the most effective interventions, and schedule ongoing meetings through the school year; and
- Ensure that each School Leadership Team conducts a needs assessment regarding the school's students who scored in Level 1 and 2, develops a plan to address their needs, and organizes a school-wide meeting to report on it and gather input from the school community.

2. Suspend for one year all high stakes policy decisions that use standardized test scores as the basis for making policy decisions, including school closings, progress reports, bonuses, and student promotion decisions and fundamentally revise the school system's current accountability strategies, measures, and tools, as well as the rewards and sanctions based on them.

The data confirm that the administration's reliance on test-based rewards and consequences as the driver for school improvement is flawed, and that focusing instruction on preparing students to do well on standardized tests does not generate the kinds of learning that will prepare them for success in college, the world of work and civic participation. Test scores and the current Progress Reports are insufficient measures of school progress and achievement. In changing the accountability system, the DoE should:

- Reduce its reliance on standardized test scores as the primary measure for evaluating schools and students so that no single test is used to make high stakes decisions;
- Increase the use of qualitative measures, including improved Quality Reviews and School Surveys, in the evaluation of schools;
- Terminate the use of letter grades for each school;
- Utilize 3-5 years of data in assessing school progress, rather than a single year of data;

- Incorporate discharge and credit recovery data for high schools;
- Integrate multiple measures of what students know and are able to do;
- Include performance in a wider range of academic subjects that extend beyond Math and ELA;
- Include rubric-based parent involvement indicators, such as the level of functioning of Parent Associations, School Leadership Teams, President Councils and Community Education Councils;
- Include “opportunity to learn standards”, such as rigorous and well-rounded curriculum, small classes, experienced teachers, and safe and healthy building conditions;
- Refrain from K-2 standardized testing; and
- Establish an Advisory Committee on Accountability that includes testing experts and stakeholders to help design a more effective accountability system and monitor the implementation.

3. Provide comprehensive support and guidance to the city’s most struggling schools.

DoE intervention cannot be limited to providing services to individual students. With more than 300 schools having two-thirds of their students scoring below standard and at least 20% of them scoring in Level 1, the test results clearly demonstrate that the DoE must develop an educational re-design plan to improve instruction and achievement in these schools, and that the central DoE must take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate support and guidance are provided to those schools and the network staff who support them. This should include:

Systemic Changes

- Expanded school day and year for students, (including flexible use of the 37.5 minutes);
- Plan to attract, train and keep excellent teams of teachers and principals, with an emphasis on programs that offer high caliber candidates at least a full year of on-the-ground pre-service preparation in urban schools, such as urban teacher residencies;
- Establish the Office for School Transformation led by an expert educator with a track record in turning around struggling schools;
- Establish Coordinating Committee that includes key stakeholders to monitor the initiative
- Strengthen and expand early learning opportunities

With support from the Children First Networks, including assigning staff to these schools,

School Level

- School Leadership Teams or School-based Transformation Committees that conduct a needs assessment and lead the re-design process;
- Active parent, student and community involvement;

- Diverse course offerings that meet the NYS requirements in art, music and sports;
- Small class size, in accordance with Contract for Excellence goals
- Integration of technology in classrooms to support student learning;
- Well-rounded, enriched college preparatory curriculum;
- Comprehensive and intensive approach to helping struggling readers;
- Strong, comprehensive support services for students, including positive approaches to discipline and conflict resolution training for the school community

We call on the DoE to work with parents and school communities to implement these proposals by prioritizing and targeting financial and program resources to serve the students and schools of greatest need. The current test score crisis serves as a reminder of the constitutional standard established in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision: New York public school students have the right to a meaningful education through high school that will prepare them for competitive employment and active civic participation. The DoE must take forward steps with the students and schools it serves to make this right a reality.