



Betty A. Rosa
Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents
Shannon Tahoe
Interim New York State Education Commissioner
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

July 21, 2020

Dear Chancellor Rosa and Commissioner Tahoe,

Thank you for your ongoing work to center the interests of the children of New York in the State's efforts to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

In that spirit, we are writing to ask that you promptly request federal waivers of assessments, accountability, and reporting requirements that would allow you to cancel the New York State English Language Arts and Mathematics tests for elementary and middle school students for the 2020-21 school year. Amidst the extreme conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting state tests cannot possibly be fair to students, would serve no meaningful purpose, would take time and money away from other more important priorities for learning and healing, and would primarily serve to increase anxiety in a traumatic time.

In the spring, [canceling the 2020 state tests](#) and Regents exams allowed our children and teachers to focus during the last months of the school year on their health and wellbeing and on adapting to remote learning without the distraction of worrying about assessments, given that schools were closed.

As the school year begins this fall, students and teachers will again find themselves in extremely challenging circumstances. Some will likely continue to be engaged in 100% remote learning. Many will likely be part of a vast educational experiment using a "blended learning" model of in-person attendance and remote learning, but possibly in widely varying amounts. Some may be in school full-time following unusual new safety practices.

All of these modes of instruction and learning will be challenging for students and teachers, and will require significant adaptation from the normal curriculum, with a focus on two key areas: basic academics adapted to the model being employed to promote sustained learning and growth, and the social and emotional supports needed as students and staff continue to confront this crisis.

We hope you agree that setting aside precious hours for instruction, learning and healing to accommodate standardized test preparation and administration has no place in the upcoming school year. State tests cannot possibly be “fair” this year, with students engaged in widely different learning modalities. They would not provide objective measures to compare to prior or future years, since many students will have so much less in-classroom time. Preparation and administration of the tests would demand scarce resources of time and money, when both will be badly stretched. Educators would face an impossible choice about what to teach and what to cut, given constrained classroom time, and would almost certainly be forced to sacrifice spending time on healing-centered practices that would help address the trauma students are experiencing. The result will be increased stress and anxiety for students, educators, and families -- something we already have far too much of -- without any meaningful educational benefit.

We recognize that it is at the discretion of the U.S. Department of Education to grant waivers, but given that a number of states ([including Georgia, South Carolina](#) and [Michigan](#)) already have requested federal assessment waivers for the upcoming school year, we believe now is the time for New York State to request that U.S. DOE grant these requests, so we can enter the school year with a clear focus on what really matters for our students.

The signatories of this letter have an array of viewpoints on high-stakes testing more generally. But we all agree they should be suspended during the COVID-19 crisis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Council Member Brad Lander
Deputy Leader for Policy
39th District, Brooklyn



Council Member Mark Treyger
Chair, Committee on Education
47th District, Brooklyn



Council Member Debi Rose
Chair, Committee on Youth Services
49th District, Staten Island



Council Member Ben Kallos
5th District, Manhattan



Council Member Diana Ayala
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Council Member Carlos Menchaca
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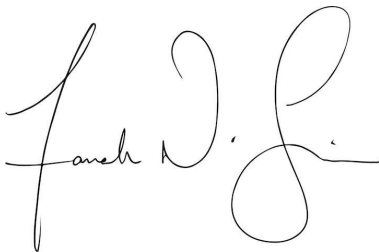
Council Member Adrienne E. Adams
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