

Karen E. Magee, *President*
Andrew Pallotta, *Executive Vice President*
Catalina R. Fortino, *Vice President*
Paul Pecorale, *Vice President*
Martin Messner, *Secretary-Treasurer*

March 8, 2016

Dear NYSUT Member:

This is to update you on developments as we continue to press — in partnership with parents — for a complete overhaul of the state’s broken system of testing and evaluations. We are making progress, we are not done, and we will not rest until New York State has ended its obsession with high-stakes tests used, incorrectly and inappropriately, as a measure of teacher effectiveness.

As a result of our non-stop advocacy in sync with parents, the governor in December acknowledged the need for a “total reboot” and created a statewide task force with strong representation by NYSUT leaders and members, including NYSUT Vice President Catalina Fortino. Subsequently:

- The task force’s 21 recommendations have begun being enacted by the Board of Regents.
- Enacted recommendations include a ban on the use of three-through-eight state standardized tests in evaluations for at least the next four years and a ban on the use in evaluations of state-provided Regents exam growth scores.
- In late February, the SED Commissioner announced a timeline — one that she stressed must be “flexible” and may be extended — for implementing revised learning standards starting in the 2018-19 school year, following a multiyear review and revisions that will include practitioners.
- After NYSUT weighed in strongly with a campaign urging the appointment of Regents who prioritize learning over testing, on March 8 the Legislature appointed three new members to the Board of Regents, paving the way for public education to move forward in a positive new direction.
- The ban on high stakes tied to state tests allows us to keep moving forward toward permanent systemic change.

Without question, much remains to be done to ensure the necessary overhaul of standards, assessments and evaluations, including:

- All 21 task force recommendations must be enacted by the now newly reconstituted Board of Regents.
- The state must complete a major course correction in student assessment, addressing concerns with the number and length of tests; the misuse of student test scores; the need for developmentally appropriate assessments; and the adoption of full transparency in testing to aid instruction and inform parents;
- The development of new standards, curriculum and assessments must be undertaken by New York State educators for New York State students in consultation with New York State parents.
- Reforms must be made permanent.

As yet another testing season gets underway, NYSUT continues to affirm the rights of parents who expressed their frustration in record numbers by opting their children in grades 3-8 out of the deeply problematic state assessments.

The decision to opt your children out of these assessments is an intensely personal one, and NYSUT's policy is to stand behind those who make this choice on behalf of their children. Our [fact sheet](#) assures NYSUT members that your union stands behind you if you choose to opt your children out and delineates members' rights and responsibilities. At the union's last Representative Assembly, NYSUT delegates passed a resolution which directed NYSUT to ask all of its members who are parents to have their own children refuse the grades 3-8 assessments. After informing yourself on the issue, including your local's position and priorities, we ask you to consider adding your own children to the growing list of those who are refusing to take the tests. Please reference the [NYSUT fact sheet](#) for what you need to know about opting out. Note that the number of students opting out is one of many factors that could affect the decision to remove a school from receivership. Because of these varying conditions at the local level, the resolution acknowledges local autonomy on this as in all issues.

It's our hope, of course, that all these tactics will be rendered unnecessary by the systemic reforms our students and educators deserve. NYSUT continues to pursue any and all solutions in the political, legislative and legal arenas, and there will undoubtedly be future actions which will require your continued commitment and your sustained support. The end goal, of course, is not any one tactic, but for the multiplicity of tactics to result in the achievement of the goal we all seek: an end to the abusive testing regime for our students, and to the misuse of standardized tests in teacher evaluations.

In solidarity,



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