



Charting a New Direction in Testing and Accountability

Under Mayor Bloomberg, New York City has come to exemplify a school system that over-relies on test-based accountability. We advocate redesigning the DOE's accountability system to focus on improving schools, rather than on grading, rewarding and sanctioning them, through the following principles:

TESTING

1. **The next mayor should not expand the current volume of standardized testing.** Instead, the new mayor should seize every opportunity to reduce or eliminate the high stakes consequences of standardized testing. For example, the new mayor should implement the following policies:
 - a. **Promotion and retention decisions should be based on a student's full body of work.** The educator's and school leader's judgment should be the primary input in such decisions, and a review should be triggered if the test results contradict that judgment. Retention decisions should also include the provision of additional academic and other supports if needed. Parents should have the right of appeal in all promotion and retention decisions.
 - b. **Eliminate single-test admissions for those specialized high schools** where the city, rather than state legislation, sets the test-based admissions criteria. Replace the test criteria with multiple measures.
 - c. **Eliminate single-test admissions for selection for Gifted and Talented programs**, and use multiple measures instead.
 - d. **Review the admissions policies** for high schools and middle schools in which test results play a major role, and deemphasize the use of such results.
 - e. **Expand the use of alternative assessments** such as portfolio and performance-based assessments to measure student progress.

ACCOUNTABILITY

2. **Eliminate the existing A to F school progress reports.** Instead, the new Chancellor should work in collaboration with stakeholders to create a system that holds the Department of Education accountable for providing a quality education to every NYC student. This new system should implement a more inclusive definition of accountability that provides feedback to teachers, students and parents and contributes to improving education, rather than imposes sanctions, based on the following policies:
 - a. **The new accountability system should provide the public with transparent access** to information on schools' accomplishments, both individually and systemically, through a website of school report cards. These report cards should provide a sophisticated portrait of school performance through a range of information on learning environment, student and teacher satisfaction, student outcomes, attendance and suspension rates, course offerings, class sizes, graduation and college readiness rates, and more. (Much of this information is currently available, but in fragmented sources that are difficult to find.)
 - b. **The new accountability system should enable the DOE to identify a set of struggling schools that need interventions and supports** to improve their academic performance. These prioritized schools should be identified through a rating system based on multiple demographic and performance indicators and transparent and equitable comparative measures that identify the schools within tiers of citywide performance to distinguish which schools are highly successful, average or struggling.
 - c. **The new accountability system should create a school improvement infrastructure** of local practitioner experts who work with school leaders, educators, students and parents to assess the strengths and needs of individual schools and develop school-based improvement plans that provide the necessary supports and interventions. Creating such an effective school improvement infrastructure will require improving the capacity of support structures such as networks and expanding the capacity of central DOE units to provide the necessary supports. (The Chancellor's District, a systemic school improvement zone which targeted struggling schools from 1995 – 2002, is one successful example.)

- d. The new accountability system should ensure that all DOE policies, including school budgeting and resource provision, teacher placement, and student assignment policies (such as high school admissions and other choice-based processes, as well as the assignment of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students overage for grade, and over-the-counter students), **do not set struggling schools up for failure and undermine systemic improvement efforts.**

STATE & FEDERAL ADVOCACY

3. Work at state and federal levels to reduce the amount and the consequences of high-stakes standardized testing by:

- a. **Advocating against the expansion of standardized tests**, and particularly against proposed policies to test young children in the early grades;
- b. **Advocating against the expansion of high stakes consequences for teachers and schools** based on standardized testing;
- c. **Advocating to significantly reduce the amount of time lost to instruction** that students and teachers spend taking and administering state standardized testing;
- d. **Advocating to significantly increase the transparency of all state testing processes**, by providing full notification of testing schedules, including field tests, expanding the public's ability to view all test instruments, and limiting the administration of field tests to students for whom explicit consent has been granted;
- e. **Advocating for elimination of single-test admissions for those specialized high schools** where the state sets the admissions criteria and for replacement with multiple measures.

