

Southern Westchester High School Principals Take a Stand on the Potential Impact of the Controversial New Teacher and Principal Evaluation System

We are amongst the 1,300 NYS principals (27 percent of all principals in the State) who are endorsing an open letter to the New York State Education Department to raise awareness about APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review), the controversial new system of teacher and principal evaluation; close to 5,000 citizens including Superintendents, Board Members, Teachers, Parents, and former Commissioner of Education, Dr. Thomas Sobol have signed on as well, and the number is growing everyday.

The entire letter can be found at www.newyorkprincipals.org and has also received local and national press coverage. The action taken is part of a statewide effort to draw attention to recent legislation (Education Law 3012-c), which beginning September 2011, requires all teachers and principals to receive a number from 0-100 to rate their performance. Part of that number (20% to 40%) will be derived from student performance on standardized tests.

We share the following three major concerns with other principals across our state: 1) Educational research and researchers strongly caution against teacher evaluation approaches like New York State's APPR legislation; 2) Students will be adversely affected by New York State's APPR, and; 3) Tax dollars are being redirected from schools to testing companies and trainers.

Although we agree that school-wide achievement results are valid evaluative criteria, we believe that a high-stakes standardized test needs to be piloted and analyzed prior to large-scale implementation. Research indicates that standardized testing has yielded almost no improvement in student learning. According to a recent study by the National Research Council, the past decade's emphasis on testing has yielded little learning progress.

Principals welcome accountability, but at the same time, an unproven and costly evaluation system is not the path to school improvement. Our primary concern is the academic, social, and emotional growth of its students, and resources should be directed to advancing this goal. While politicians and bureaucrats and unions debate whether this evaluation system is good or bad for adults, we need to ask whether it is good or bad for students.

We believe, as our colleague from Long Island, High School Principal Carol Burris stated in "Using Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers Is Based on the Wrong Values" (NY Times Schoolbook 1/25/12) that numerical evaluations of educators, 40 percent of which is based on student test scores and achievement, can damage the relationship between teachers and students, a relationship at the heart of student success. It will accelerate teaching to tests instead of teaching to the needs of kids. It will put teachers in the terrible position of wondering whether the performance of their weakest students on a test might be a threat to their careers. It will make principals hesitate to lead schools where test scores are low.

Advocates of systems like the new evaluation system in New York, however, look to the business world for school improvement ideas. From this perspective, test scores are viewed as analogous to the way a business looks at profits. These advocates believe that if teachers are in

fear of losing their jobs, they will intensify their efforts to raise students' scores. The focus is the score (the "profit"), not the child. For these folks, test scores are the bottom line, and these "bottom line" reformers believe that what gets measured gets done.

Educators have a different belief. We believe that what is nurtured grows.

We also believe that test scores have their place as one of many indicators of learning. We will continue to evaluate our effectiveness through a variety of measures that will always include but never be limited to standardized tests. Our students deserve no less from us.

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Gina Healy	Blind Brook High School
Clement Ceccarelli	BOCES
Eileen Bloom	BOCES
Terence Barton	Bronxville High School
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Barry Friedman	Edgemont High School
James Ruck	Harrison High School
Lou Adipietro	Hastings High School
Scott Mosenthal	Irvington High School
Elizabeth Clain	Mamaroneck High School
Donald Conetta	New Rochelle High School
Jeannine Clark	Pelham Memorial High School
Dawn Bartz	Pleasantville High School
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Patricia Taylor	Rye High School
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