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Standardized Testing in New York State

In recent years, New York State has increased its use of standardized testing to measure student achievement, as well as educator and school district performance. Some argue that the current use of testing limits classroom instructional time and that too much weight is placed on the results of these tests. Supporters of testing argue that it can be a valuable metric in determining and tracking a student's performance and assessing the effectiveness of a school district and its educators.

Scope of the Problem

Standardized testing has grown to become a noteworthy part of the New York State education system. Currently, standardized testing in New York's public education system begins in third grade and continues through high school. The New York State Department of Education posits that testing students is a practical means of rating the effectiveness of educators and school districts in educating students, as well as for tracking the performance of students throughout their academic careers (NYC Department of Education).

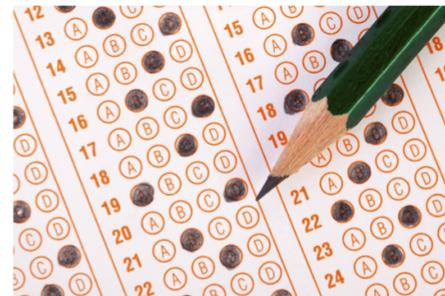
Opponents to New York State's current policies regarding standardized testing cite numerous concerns. First, many dissenters argue that the frequency of testing limits the instructional time that teachers have in the classroom and the topics they can cover. In the same vein, those opposed to standardized testing assert that the tests encourage teachers and school districts to educate students in a way that seeks to have students do well on state tests, while possibly compromising a student's comprehensive understanding of the material. Likewise, many also fear that these tests put extra stress on students at school (NYC Department of Education).

Standardized testing has also been criticized due to its possible inaccuracy as a measure of teacher performance. Some argue that testing pupils is a logical way to assess teachers as it measures how much a student has learned in the classroom. However, some object that there are better ways of evaluating teachers than by testing students, such

as in-class teaching evaluations, especially because these tests tend to be made by third parties.

Past Policy

New York State began to experiment with the concept of standardized, statewide testing of students as early as 1864. At this time, the New York State Board of Regents passed an ordinance that required a "...public examination [to] be held of all scholars presumed to have completed preliminary studies (NYSED 2012)...." The ordinance was edited and amended regarding the content of the tests several times between its inception and 1959. In 1959, the long-standing system was replaced with a series of tests for junior high school students. These tests ceased in the 1960's due to more students continuing their education through high school and modernization of the state's testing system (NYSED 2012).



The Regents Examinations, perhaps the most recognizable set of tests in New York State's educational system, were created in 1879. The test sought to analyze the achievement of those completing secondary education and determine a student's readiness for graduation. Subjects included in the series of tests were mathematics, natural sciences, philosophy, ancient literature, social

studies Latin, and foreign language. The test was revised for content until about 1970 when a more modern form of the exam was created and remains largely unaltered. The last major revision was in 1988 when the social studies exam was separated into two different tests (one global history and geography and the other in American history). The current Regents Exam series consists of mathematics, English language arts, natural sciences, foreign language, and social studies. Passing this series of tests continues to be standard for graduating from many high schools across New York State (NYSED 2012).

Federal educational policy has also driven state policy as the nation shifts more toward the “marble cake” model of Federalism in which lower governments are influenced by higher levels of government through the use of grants, funding, and other incentives in reward for specific action. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the first federal policy to target education and was implemented under President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The Act called for increased aid to schools and sought to promote education for the nation’s citizens through enhancing the public education system. Later, in 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was implemented under President George W. Bush. NCLB was similar to ESEA in that it sought to promote and expand public education. In many cases, NCLB also expanded standardized testing of students based on federal standards. State educational systems were to receive additional funding for complying with NCLB (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction 2016).

Current Policy



The current New York State policy regarding standardized testing is a product of the federal government’s educational standards set by Common Core and Race to the Top, implemented under President Barack Obama in 2009. Common Core and Race to the Top provide grants and funding to states and school districts that comply with federal educational standards (U.S. Department of Education 2016). New York State adopted these standards in 2010 and began taking steps to implement them in the New York State educational curriculum (NYSED 2011).

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The New York State Department of Education is tasked with administering the program at the state level based on federal guidelines. Currently, New York State complies with Common Core guidelines regarding student assessment by employing standardized testing. In grades three through eight, tests primarily take place in the spring of each school year to assess the learning of a student. Students are tested in English language arts, math, and science. After eighth grade, the Regents Exam series serves primarily as the metric for compliance with Common Core and student assessment (NYC Department of Education 2016).

New York State has faced criticism for its implementation of Common Core standards, including thousands of students opting out of the tests. A Siena College Research

Institute poll from October 2015 showed that 63% of New York voters are familiar with Common Core and with 61%

believing that the program has worsened or had no effect on education in New York State (SRI 2015). The federal government

recently threatened to cut funding if more than 5% of New York students opted out of testing (Burke and Chapman 2015). However, in some states, such as California, the program’s implementation has had favorable opinions from citizens, as high as 60% and 70% approval in some cases (Noguchi 2014).

Recently, the New York State Department of Education decided to review its Common Core compliance programs in 2015 amid public criticism under its AIMHighNY review. The department established two committees of educators, administrators, and parents to address Common Core concerns primarily regarding math and English instruction and testing. Since the Fall of 2015, the committees have been actively reviewing New York State’s implementation of Common Core and making preliminary revision plans. Actions to revise New York’s Common Core compliance programs have yet to be taken as the review is ongoing (NYSED 2015). S Potentially signaling a shift in the policy, the New York State Department of Education waived penalties for schools not completing teacher evaluations for the 2015-2016 school year (Bump 2016).



Policy Options and Model Programs

Increased Educator Control in Test Development

Currently, major educational corporations, such as Pearson, develop many of New York State's tests. Allowing educators to have more control over the development of these parts of the program would ensure the comprehensive education of students. Also, by allowing educators to have a role in creating tests, the tests would may more accurately measure what students are learning in class (Decker 2015).

Common Core Withdrawal

New York could choose to withdraw from participating in Common Core Standards. Oklahoma, Indiana, and South Carolina have taken this route. If New York did this, however, the state would lose the program's handsome federal education funding. This would quiet protestors, but many would be unhappy with the loss of funding. Loss of this federal funding would likely result in program cuts and school improvement projects (Camera 2015).

Increased School District Control

California has allowed its school districts greater control over the implementation of Common Core Standards. Whereas New York school districts state level policies and have seen resistance, the State of California opted for a more decentralized implementation approach. New York could allow school districts to draft their own plans for Common Core implementation (Noguchi 2014).

Key Organizations

New York State has two main governmental agencies tasked with administering educational policy. Additionally, multiple lobbying groups and non-government organizations exist that attempt to influence policy related to education.

- **New York State Department of Education (NYSED):** This state agency is tasked with regulating public and charter schools in New York State. NYSED has great influence over the implementation of educational policy in New York State.
- **New York State Board of Regents:** The New York State Board of Regents oversees the legitimacy of schools in New York State and ensures they are meeting the appropriate standards to be accredited.
- **New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE):** NYSAPE is one of the main lobbying groups leading dissenters against New York State's implementation of Common Core Standards. NYSAPE organizes supporters to oppose New York State's current Common Core policies.
- **New York State United Teachers (NYSUT):** NYSUT is New York's leading union for educators. The union largely represents public school educators and seeks to influence state educational policy through lobbying efforts.

Glossary of Terms

Standardized Test: A test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions and the distribution of scores on the test is normalized (Great Schools Partnership 2014).

Federalism: A system of government where multiple governing bodies control an area (Cornell University 2016).

Marble Cake Federalism: A model of government, particularly Federalism, where all levels of government are invested in and influence the action of another level and powers tend to intermingle (USLegal 2016).

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Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

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