

2015 Issues Brief: Assessing Student and Teacher Performance

In this year's Executive budget, Governor Cuomo has demanded that the legislature adopt a "reform agenda" prior to even releasing specifics of a 2015 state aid proposal. While NYS PTA, the Educational Conference Board (ECB) and others have vehemently objected to this strategy, the Governor has made his program reform agenda part of the budget agenda that must be considered. A key aspect of that agenda addresses student testing, the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) and the manner in which student test results are linked to that performance review.

Background: The current teacher and principal performance review model (APPR) was adopted in 2012 and has been used to rate educator performance as Highly Effective, Effective, Developing or Ineffective in each of the past two years. In arriving at a performance rating, 20% of the score is based on growth as measured by State tests, 20% on local tests and 60% on "other" measures including classroom observation. Under the governor's proposal, 50% of the APPR score would be based on state tests, 15% on local administrator observation and 35% on observation by an outside evaluator.

New York State presently administers federally required tests to assess year to year student performance growth in Math and English/ Language Arts (ELA) to all students in grades 3-8. Regents' exams measuring skill mastery are administered to high school students. Still other tests are administered to measure student achievement where standardized assessments may not exist. Questions for new standardized tests are also "field tested" by either administering tests to samples of students or imbedding trial questions into existing tests. Finally, teachers in classrooms every day use a wide range of diagnostic measures to guide instructional practice and identify specific student deficiencies.

NYS PTA believes that student assessment is a valid and valuable aspect of instruction but recent experience has led us to conclude that directly linking standardized student tests scores to individual teacher performance ratings has damaged the professional evaluation system and the quality of instruction it was designed to improve. We conclude that as a result of these recent changes, we test too much; our tests are far too long and we use test results for too many purposes unrelated to improvement of classroom instruction. Parents also express concern that Instructional time devoted to test preparation has increased and that instructional content has "narrowed" where tested subjects receive greater emphasis than those that are not tested. Rather than discuss alternatives, the Governor has proposed that student test results play an even greater role in individual educator evaluation. Additionally, he would diminish the role of local administrators in the review process and base non-test ratings solely on observation rather than the multiple aspects of the Regents' teaching standards, some of which may not be evident from a classroom observation. We propose the following:

- Use standardized assessments for their original purpose, as measures of educational attainment and to measure effectiveness of the school community as a whole, identifying gaps in education across schools, districts and demographic sub-groups
- Judge performance of individual educators based on how each teacher or principal uses diagnostic data to improve instruction
- Reduce the "seat time" devoted to Math and ELA testing in grades 3-8
- Appropriate \$8.4 million requested by the Education Department to eliminate stand alone field testing and increase the amount of test feedback available to teachers and parents
- Use *NYS Teaching Standards and Performance Indicators* adopted by the Regents in 2011 as the primary basis for assessing individual teacher performance as well as for building and delivering effective professional development programs
- Employ rubrics that make teacher performance assessment more objective and develop the skills of local administrators to use them
- Reject the Governor's proposal to base 35% of a performance review on outside observer judgment
- Hold local administrators responsible for productive performance review of the teachers they supervise