

**NYS PTA Responses to Questions Posed to NYSSBA Panel by Timothy Kremer,  
Executive Director of NYS School Boards Association on October 19, 2015**

**Schools aren't factories. We're in the people business, not the widget business. Successful schools are built on common focus and collaboration. Successful collaborations are built on productive relationships and productive relationships are based on mutual trust. That said:**

- 1. Q. What recommendations from the governor's Common Core Task Force would satisfy PTA members? I'm going to give you six, three on how test results should be used and three on test questions themselves.**
  - a. As we shift to new standards student test results should be used solely for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. That means getting the instructional implementation right. Suspend use of test results for teacher evaluation until curriculum and instructional practice have stabilized and test results are reliable and we can trust their predictive value.
  - b. Get test validity and reliability right before assigning post test proficiency labels. Parents don't understand cut scores, especially when they change each year relative to raw scores. The practice of setting cut scores after test results are known reduces trust in those results because parents conclude that policy makers can set proficiency levels to make any case they choose.
  - c. If proficiency labels are to be assigned, assure access to Academic Intervention Services (AIS) to support instruction for students judged non proficient rather than setting still another artificial cut score that merely keeps AIS eligibility at an arbitrary percentage of the population.
  - d. We want to challenge our kids but we don't want them giving up. Don't try to do too many things with each question. Giving up may be the result. Every test question needs a specific purpose and teachers need to understand that purpose. If the purpose is to assess skill or application, use questions that are simple and direct. On the other hand, if the purpose is to assess how students understand what is being asked, use higher language in the questions but simpler reading content in the task itself.
  - e. Assure that tests are aligned grade to grade and connected to ultimately predict performance on Regents exams
  - f. Consider the interest level of the subjects presented in readings, particularly for younger students. Interesting and relevant material encourages effort.

**2. Q. What will convince parents not to have their children opt-out of standardized tests?** Right now? Not much - It took three years to convince parents of 200,000 students to opt out and it may take just as long to convince them otherwise. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Parents need to trust that testing will actually benefit their kids and right now, that's not what they see. In our view, turning this around will require some rather dramatic change. Make tests shorter. Turn around results faster. Share question and response results with teachers, help them explain results to parents and above all, suspend the link between test results and educator evaluations until instructional implementation has stabilized. Parents need to feel part of the dialogue. They don't want to conclude they are being ignored or that their children are being used as tools for motives that aren't directly related to instructional improvement.

**3. Q. Do your members believe that math test questions are too hard because parents can't sufficiently help out with the homework?**

Yeah, they do. Big time. This doesn't mean that homework or test questions should be easy or that students shouldn't become frustrated with their assignments. Challenge and frustration are both essential to learning and just because parents struggle with assignments doesn't mean we should make them easier or abandon them altogether. At the same time, (and this is critical) this is an area where parents and schools really need to work cooperatively. It's essential to discuss when and how parents should be able and expected to help students with homework and when kids should be left to figure things out for themselves. Either way, parents need to have confidence that higher expectations will benefit their children and trust that instructional strategies will help their kids respond to future challenges. That confidence won't be there if we conclude that we're competing with each other rather than being on the same page.