

## Education Reform: What Now?

Last week, eight years after the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) expired, Every Student Succeeds Act, (ESSA) the single greatest change in National Education Policy in many years was signed into law. A thousand pages of legislation boil down to two simple principles: student testing remains but states get to set standards and determine how they use those standards to evaluate schools and educators.

Already, two camps are emerging.

- The first says, we have had enough of reform and testing. We want to be done with Common Core and go back to the way things used to be.
- The second says, we should Pause, reflect on what works, change what does not; then move forward. NYS PTA falls into the latter.

What do parents and the education community really want for our students from the education system? It is not complicated. We ask:

1. What do we want our children to know and be able to do? How do we know when those goals have been met?
2. What information do schools need to keep education reform moving in the right direction?
3. What impact do educators make in our children's learning and how do we know it?

### **What do we want our children to know and be able to do? - Standards, Curriculum and Instruction**

Research demonstrates that where there are high expectations and support for those expectations by educators and parents, children achieve! NYS PTA has long supported the higher aspirations for *all* students expressed in the Common Core Standards, but understand that a short time frame, limited resources, and an overemphasis on immediate results have caused tremendous stress over the past five years. As with any change, adjustments are necessary to get us where we need to be. This takes time.

The NYS Education Department continues to seek feedback from communities and educators on standards and testing that will lead to necessary adjustments. We ask that they be allowed to do their job as professionals with minimal interference from our legislators in that process.

Researchers also point out that 21<sup>st</sup> century success depends on ability to communicate, collaborate, think critically and create. While the global economy asks more of workers, recent events reinforce the idea that our everyday life is global. This fundamental shift requires new curriculum, challenging assessments and fundamental changes in instructional practice. The transition is complex and requires extensive professional development, integration across all subject areas, and the full engagement of families and communities. Schools must spend this time wisely to improve local practice and state resources must support each aspect of the transition.

### **How do we know when our children meet those goals? What information do school systems need to keep education reform moving in the right direction? - Assessments**

Standardized testing continues under ESSA. This is to ensure that we are not overlooking or under expecting performance of some students or communities. The NYS Education Department promises streamlined testing and adaptive assessments that today's technology makes possible. We need an

immediate and substantial investment to develop these assessment tools, improve instruction and promote learning, not punish educators or students.

Assessments serve two functions. They tell us what students have learned and help to identify opportunities to improve the learning process. We call upon those who will design or select tests to remember that we are working with children.

- Tests must be shorter,
- Content must be interesting, and
- Questions must reflect the both the substance and nature of instruction while being relevant to how and where students live.

Educators must be assured that scoring methods, cut scores and scales are reliable and provide an accurate view of student performance. We must also provide parents and communities with clear, trustworthy data on how individuals, groups of students, and schools compare across the state.

With student mobility, parents and families must have quality information to make the best possible choices for their children and communities. Families need comparative information on school performance when selecting where their child will learn. The education department and the legislators must support families and communities as full partners in this effort.

Finally, assessment of student performance must be the springboard for school improvement. ESSA enables schools to use multiple measures of effectiveness, including attendance, graduation rates and school climate as part of a whole school review. Communities whose schools are underperforming need good comparative benchmarks when setting goals for improvement. NYS PTA encourages all to participate in the assessment process and improvement directed discussions as the system changes.

#### **How do we know that Educators make a difference? - Educator Impact -**

When asked about schooling, everyone can point to an educator who made the difference, positively or negatively. But defining what makes a great educator remains a challenge. We risk devaluing the importance of good teachers and instructional practice, thereby risking an entire profession if we avoid examining APPR. In 2011, the Board of Regents, with parent and educator input, adopted teaching standards. Great teachers must:

- know their students,
- know their subject matter,
- successfully employ research-based instructional practices,
- establish a classroom climate that is conducive to effective learning,
- select meaningful assessments and use results to improve the learning experience,
- collaborate with families, communities and each other, and
- take responsibility for professional improvement.

It is critical that we move educator evaluation away from an imbalanced matrix focused on single test scores to assessing educators on a broad spectrum of quality standards. We can only make progress when we use the full potential of the teacher evaluation process as an opportunity to improve practice.

We ask legislators to empower school boards, educators and parents to redesign an APPR evaluation system that is accurate, fair, and transparent, resulting in improved instructional practice and

information that provides families and communities with the confidence that they are placing children in the care of quality educators.

The Every Student Succeeds Act gives New York a real opportunity to move forward on our own terms. Let us not waste it. It is essential that we use this opportunity not to retreat from reform but to reflect on what is required to move it forward.

NYS PTA asks Governor Cuomo, the legislature, the Regents and SED not to simply implement a pause in linking student performance to grading educators, but to make a joint and determined effort to use that time to collaboratively build a future that will prepare every child for the success we aspire for all children regardless of zip code or income.