

**BUFFALO COUNCIL OF SUPERVISORS AND ADMINISTRATORS
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**Local No. 10 - A. F. S. A. - AFL-CIO
1500 Elmwood Avenue • Buffalo, New York 14207**



**** TESTIMONY ****

To the New York State Senate Committee on Education

Public Hearing

THE REGENTS REFORM AGENDA: “ASSESSING” OUR PROGRESS

Wednesday, October 16, 2013

Buffalo, New York

BCSA PANEL:

Tamara Alsace, Ph.D.; Director of Multilingual Education

William Boatwright-Elementary Principal

Kevin Eberle; Secondary Principal

Genelle Morris; Assistant Superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability

Thank you Senator Flanagan and members of the State Senate, for coming to Buffalo today to listen to our perspectives on one of the most important initiatives ever advanced in New York education policy. The Regents' Reform Agenda presents an array of higher standards and measures of accountability intended to inform the State's entire system of instruction. These reforms support the Common Core Learning Standards also being utilized in a number of other states.

We are grateful of the opportunity to speak before you today. On behalf of the Buffalo Council of Supervisors and Administrators (BCSA) Local #10, allow us to introduce ourselves:

Tamara Alsace, Ph.D.; Director of Multilingual Education

William Boatwright; Elementary Principal

Kevin Eberle; Secondary Principal

Genelle Morris; Assistant Superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability

We are pleased today to represent BCSA President Crystal Barton and our 217 fellow BCSA members – who serve as Principals, Assistant Principals, Directors, Supervisors, Dean of Students, Instructional Specialists, Assistant Superintendents and Project Administrators in the Buffalo Public Schools.

Allow us first to tell you a bit about our schools and the children we serve. As you likely know, the Buffalo School District is the second largest district in New York State, serving nearly 34,000 students in nearly 60 facilities. Over 70 languages are spoken in our schools every day, and 89% of the District's population is considered to be economically disadvantaged. We have 38 elementary, 17 secondary and 2 special schools over an area of 42 square miles. More than 7,000 students are enrolled in 16 charter schools that are financially supported by our District.

Our schools offer Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Law Magnet, Career and Technical Education programs, as well as an array of traditional courses. Although a number of our schools have been designated as “persistently low-performing” or “priority,” Buffalo is also home to the first person designated as a “Distinguished New York State Educator,” who is

expected to assist the district in its mission to decrease the number of “priority” schools. While we have many challenges, we likewise have many, many professionals who work hard every day to provide students the instruction and resources they need to be successful in school and in their lives, post-graduation.

THE REGENTS’ REFORM AGENDA

The Regents’ Reform Agenda presents an array of higher standards and measures of accountability intended to inform the State’s entire system of instruction. These reforms support the Common Core Learning Standards also being utilized in a number of other states. In New York, the scale and pacing of implementing these changes - the implementation of both higher standards and a new system of accountability - has come with great stress on the status quo of educational practice. These issues have been examined and discussed at length by your committee already.

Allow us then to offer what we hope are several observations and recommendations in order to maximize the potential of these changes, and to retain the committed support of the professionals who have to make these efforts live and grow:

CAPACITY

We have a significant teaching capacity issue with respect to the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. This capacity has to be addressed at the pre-service level and in teacher training/professional development. Basically, we are asking teachers to perform instructional tasks that heretofore they have never been trained in.

A teacher in this learning construct must not only know the Common Core Standards at a deep level, but he or she must be able to assess and analyze instructional data with a high degree of skill. To be effective, a teacher must:

- Be able to combine their knowledge of new standards and assessment,
- Possess an ability to make instructional decisions based on data; and

- Understand and identify appropriately rigorous teaching strategies aligned to the standard.

This is a profound change and a daunting prospect for even for the consummate professional teacher. So imagine the work that must be done with novice teachers and teachers - who in some cases have years of poor habits - to operationalize these changes and be successful in so doing.

INCREASE THE EFFICACY AND CAPACITY OF OUR TEACHING CORPS

In order to ultimately improve instructional outcomes for students, we must first significantly increase the efficacy and capacity of our teaching corps to meet the new demands that have been placed upon them.

The call for teacher and school leader accountability is a worthy and right course of action. However, it must be done with precision and in a manner that addresses a central issue to low student achievement-ineffective educators. To date, it is an extremely complicated and time-consuming process to remove adults who do no good for children. Yet we have created an accountability system that has unintended consequences for those who do good work and almost rewards those who have gamed the system. The reform movement has yet to address this continuing issue.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF (APPR) PROCESS

New York is one of the many states that have developed a teacher evaluation system, now fully implemented in all of its 697 public school districts. As the results from these new systems are used for high stakes results, it is extremely important that these systems are subject to additional research.

As it currently stands, NYSED is not required to assess the annual professional performance review process itself - to determine whether or not the evaluation system is actually adequately and effectively evaluating the professional performance of educators. BCSA is among those

groups calling for an independent review of the evaluation system, in order to determine its accuracy in assessing a professional educator's effectiveness in a classroom or leading a school.

Many questions remain concerning the relationship between student scores and teacher effectiveness through such a high accountability lens. Collecting and analyzing data about teacher effectiveness that can be used to improve practice and achieve growth remains a challenge to states across the country. As New York is one of the first states in the country to overhaul its' tests in line with the new Common Core standards, educators have concerns about how much time it will take to learn the new rules before they are used for high-stakes decisions. How much time will it take? And can we afford to wait?

For measurable gains to be detected and linked to the implementation of the new system, we know it will need time to work. New York has administered the first round of the new tests based on the new rigorous standards in 2013. With all the public school districts in New York State now participating in the system, as well as similar systems established in states across the country, it is imperative that we continue to conduct studies that are designed to provide information on factors that contribute to the evaluation of teachers in public schools. Further study is necessary to explore the linkage between teacher evaluation scores and their students' performance on outcomes measures. Policy makers at the state and district levels make decisions to restructure how we evaluate teachers to support school reform. The intent of these policies is good – providing students with the best teachers to provide their education. However, we need to be mindful that high stakes systems such as these will need time to work and results will not be immediate.

Such a review must also include consideration of factors beyond the control of a school leader, such as absenteeism.

IMPLEMENTATION OF REGENTS AGENDA BY TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (EMERGENT BILINGUALS)

EngageNY- TheEngageNY website is a great resource for teachers and administrators in implementing the Common Core. It is critical that as curricular and professional development materials are developed, the scaffolds and supports necessary for the success of English language

learners and students with disabilities be built in at the same time. In addition, congruent native language materials for students in bilingual programs must be developed. These materials should be developed simultaneously with the "mainstream" materials, not afterwards.

Clarity is needed on the role and accountability of all teachers and administrators in improving the academic achievement of ELLs. Accountability is essential, but must be differentiated based on the length of time a student has been in a NY school. More sample SLOs for bilingual and ESL teachers, with rigorous yet realistic targets are needed.

Revision of Part 154 to the Commissioner's Regulations - The timely adoption of revisions to Commissioner's Regulations Part 154, which govern services, rights, and responsibilities with regard to English language learners, must be revised with consideration for the feedback from the field, as soon as possible. Careful consideration must be given to all the regulations but special attention must be given to the following areas:

- The role of CSEs in identifying or making recommendations for ELLs/bilingual learners with disabilities.
- The time period for identification and placement.
- The time period to correct misidentifications.
- The identification and appropriate services for subgroups (SIFEs, Early Childhood/preschoolers, students with disabilities, and Caribbean students from homes where Creole and non-Creole languages are spoken. This last group has been totally ignored).
- Definition of Native Language Arts aligned to Language Allocation Policy. NLA is **not** given the relevance that it deserves in the current spirit of **Biliteracy**.
- Review of ESL charts
- Students' accumulation of credits through ELA and NLA.
- Certification requirements and professional development for teachers, teacher assistants, and school administrators.

- Completion of the Bilingual Progressions and infusions of ELL strategies, scaffolds, etc. in all materials prepared and posted to Engage NY
- An emphasis on the assessment of home language skills and abilities in the first years of ESL instruction is needed. It is also critical that there be accountability for the language other than English in a bilingual program.

In order to prepare our ELLs for the challenges of the Common Core, college, and career, we must begin early. Preschool services, both bilingual and ESL, are critical. More informational and support materials for multilingual parents and community members are needed in a variety of languages, including those prevalent in the western part of NYS. Much more training and support for all stakeholders is needed as we implement this rigorous reform agenda and realistic timeframes are critical to thoughtful and effective implementation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Data continues to support the need for strong leadership in school buildings. Recent research has measured and evaluated the impact that school leaders have on students' academic progress and success. Findings highlighted in several recent studies reveal that:

- Strong Principal leadership is especially important for revitalizing failing schools.
- Results indicate that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between 2 and 7 months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount.
- Instability of school leadership is often cited as an impediment to improving high-poverty and low-performing schools.

All this brings our testimony here today full-circle. BCSA members are invested in school achievement and closing the gap. We're accountable too. School reform has to cease being a

blame game, but instead a real conversation about student success. , We need a different conversation, and we need your help.

We must begin a dialogue as to how to support our school leaders as we implement reforms with limited funding. We have to talk about recruiting talented people into the profession. Great schools begin with great leaders. It is our mission to equip them with the tools they need to succeed.

Respectfully submitted,

Buffalo Council of Supervisors and Administrators, Local #10