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April 22, 2015

Chancellor Merryl Tisch
New York State Board of Regents
State Education Building
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, N.Y. 12234

Chancellor Merryl Tisch:

This week, nearly two hundred thousand parents and students opted-out of the state's controversial high stakes standardized exams. These alarming opt-out numbers clearly demonstrate that there is a major problem with high stakes testing in New York State. I am asking the Board of Regents to place an immediate two-year moratorium on the creation of this "evaluation" system in order to delay the Governor's testing policy until it can be fully studied.

New Yorkers do not have faith in our current high-stakes testing culture. This was recently evidenced in a Siena Poll where the majority of those surveyed disagreed with the effectiveness of the Governor's test-heavy education reforms, its political linkage to the state budget, and its punitive impact on all stakeholders. Across my district, the growing momentum behind opt-out is largely attributed to a broken top-down approach to public education. Contrary to the beliefs of Albany insiders, this movement isn't teacher-driven, it's parent-driven.

For years, the fate of public education has been caught in the crossfire of Albany's toxic political environment. Our state must cede its out of touch educational agenda and return to a democratic bottom-up approach that acknowledges that high stakes testing was never designed or meant to evaluate teachers. As Chancellor, you have the ability to accomplish this by rewriting the wrongs of the budget season and restoring standardized testing to a learning tool that actually improves the quality and equity of public education for every student.

Furthermore, the Board of Regents has an obligation to demonstrate that it is still the apolitical policymaking body it was designed to be. In doing so, it can seize the opportunity to study the effects of our current evaluative methods and finally initiate long overdue dialogue within our communities. That is the only way we can fully restore trust in our state's educational system.

As I have said many times before, we need to find common ground and achieve meaningful consensus before we implement testing policies that will negatively impact the way our children are educated in this state. It is my hope that you see this same rationale behind the moratorium request and work with parents, educators, and students to make this possible. With New York at a critical crossroads, we can afford nothing less.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Panepinto". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Marc C. Panepinto
New York State Senator
60th Senate District