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## NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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### **Senate Majority Passes Legislation To Prioritize Students Education Over High-Stakes Testing**

*The bill, sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer, returns teacher and principal evaluations back to local control*

(Albany, NY) The Senate Majority Conference today passed the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) ([S.1262](#)) that amends the 2015 education law requiring state-created or administered assessments as a subcomponent to determine a teacher or principal's effectiveness. The new bill eliminates the mandatory use of state assessments to determine a teacher or principal's effectiveness and empowers school districts and teachers to make the decision on whether to use standardized tests in teacher or principal evaluations.

"Today we made it clear that we will continue to stand up for New Yorkers," said **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. "We made college more affordable, we have made it possible for all teachers to teach without undue burdens, and we passed tax relief for middle class New Yorkers by making the property tax cap permanent."

**Bill Sponsor and Chair of Committee on Education Senator Shelley Mayer** said, "Our teachers and students are more than their test scores. Thank you to Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues for changing state law to allow school districts to determine the most effective ways to measure student and teacher performance. With this bill, we empower our local communities to identify the most appropriate assessments for their students and the relationship of those assessments to teachers' evaluations. Excessive reliance on standardized testing is detrimental to student engagement in the classroom. This bill allows local school districts the flexibility to work with teachers to create evaluation systems that meet the needs of students and the district."

Over the past two years, changes have been made regarding teacher and principal evaluation at the state and federal level. Since the 2015-16 Enacted State budget, school district APPR plans required the use of state-created or administered assessments to determine a teacher or principal's effectiveness and approval to remain eligible for state aid increases. The legislation returns teacher evaluations back to local control with no state mandates and removes state test scores in teacher and principal evaluations as part of APPR.

It also provides security that school districts will not lose their state aid increases while negotiating their decision. The State Assembly has passed previous APPR amendments 10 consecutive times with 50 co-sponsors, but the former Senate Republican Majority refused to allow this legislation to the floor for a vote.

**Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris** said, "Teachers should be able to focus on helping children learn, not teaching to the tests driving performance evaluations. The new New York Senate knows when we support our students and teachers we strengthen our schools and provide a better education for the next generation."

**Senator Alessandra Biaggi** said, “We want our teachers to be effective, but high stakes tests are not the best way to judge teachers and teaching to the tests is not the best way to educate our children. It makes more sense to let local school districts work out the best system with their local teachers’ union, relying on input of teachers and principals. We must also recognize that teachers’ effectiveness depends on appropriate supports and resources, like small class size, new-teacher mentors, school counselors, community-based programs, and necessary educational materials, and thus on adequate school funding.”

**Senator Neil Breslin** said, “The current testing and evaluation system simply doesn't work. It is critical that we return teacher evaluation to local control. This legislation will allow local school districts to establish a more fair and effective evaluation system.”

**Senator David Carlucci** said, “If teachers are only teaching to a test then they are doing a disservice to our students. Standardized test scores are only one measure of a student's success and do not reflect the effectiveness of teachers and administrators in the classroom. Instead, we need a teacher evaluation system that better serves our children and educators.”

**Senator Leroy Comrie** said, “Rigid performance metrics based on standardized test scores have shown to be a tremendous impediment on the success of our students and educators alike. I support S.1262 because it reaffirms our state’s commitment to common-sense reforms that will give students greater opportunity to learn and grow, and educators the flexibility they need to teach our diverse student population.”

**Senator Jim Gaughran** said, “Public school teachers are the cornerstone of New York's excellent public school system. Teachers and students deserve fully funded public schools, not over-testing or the arbitrary linkage of test scores to teacher performance. We don’t need annual tests to know how our students are progressing, we need to maintain local control. Our teachers are already evaluating student achievements every day in their classrooms, and perpetually modifying their lesson plans to provide the best education possible. I am proud to cast my vote to repeal the ineffective APPR evaluation system and look forward to fighting for increased education aid to Long Island public schools.”

**Senator Pete Harckham** said, “It’s time to end the practice of evaluating educators based primarily on student test scores. This puts an undue burden on students and teachers alike, and doesn’t necessarily reflect on educators’ proficiency or effectiveness.”

**Senator Brad Hoylman** said, “Students are much more than their test scores and so are their teachers. No fair evaluation of a teacher can rest on these assessments. As the proud parent of a child in New York City’s public schools, I have seen the failings of our current system firsthand. We need a system that gives students and their teachers the opportunity to grow. Today we move closer to it. I applaud Leader Andrea Stewart- Cousins, Senator Shelley Mayer, and my colleagues in the Democratic Majority for their leadership on this critical issue.”

**Senator Todd Kaminsky** said, “As the son and grandson of teachers, I am proud to vote today for this vital bill, which will allow for a public education system where teaching - not testing - is the focus.”

**Senator Anna M. Kaplan** said, “New York State experimented with a “one size fits all” approach to teacher evaluations, and the end result was a lot more mandates and tests, without providing the support teachers need to best serve their students. By passing APPR Teacher Evaluation Reform, we’re returning control to the local school districts, who are best suited to find solutions that meet the needs of their own community.”

**Senator John Liu** said, “Teacher evaluations have been mired in controversy and delay, unnecessarily so. This legislation is a solid step forward in providing accountability without stripping away the professionalism our teachers pride themselves on, and will result in better education for our kids than the status quo provides.”

**Senator Monica Martinez** said, “As a former educator and school administrator for 14 years, I understand the want for a fair teacher evaluation process that does not subject children to unnecessary testing. Teachers need to cultivate the love of learning and a thirst for knowledge, rather than 'teaching-to-the-test.' A teacher’s performance, and a child’s value, cannot be boiled down to standardized testing scores. It is time to let the teachers teach, and let the students learn.”

**Senator Roxanne J. Persaud** said, “Determining a teacher’s worth based solely off their class’ exam scores is flawed, and a school does not deserve to lose funding as a result. By eliminating this requirement in the APPR, we are giving control back to the districts who know their educators best.”

**Senator Jessica Ramos** said, “Standardized testing is not a fair or accurate measure of our student's potential or our educators' effectiveness and they systematically disadvantage students, predominantly of color, who do not have the resources to perform well on these exams. Passing APPR is a step in lessening the burden of students and educators to perform to testing standards that do not accurately represent the breadth of their capabilities.”

**Senator Gustavo Rivera** said, “Using mandatory standardized testing to determine the success of teachers is simply irresponsible and ineffective. By reversing this practice, we will be able to implement a lasting and reasonable teacher evaluations system, to ultimately ensure that we truly improve the educational outcomes of our schools and students.”

**Senator James Sanders Jr.** said, “There is so much more to education than just the capability of achieving a high score on a standardized test. Under those conditions, I believe we should evaluate our teachers on their ability to provide students with well-rounded skills and professional development. The repeal of APPR is critical to eliminating the ‘teach to the test’ mentality, allows good teachers to remain in classrooms, and advances the mission of providing a nurturing environment for our youth to learn and grow.”

**Senator Jose Serrano** said, “Standardized testing does not account for several factors, including the diversity of our communities and the learning styles and educational needs of individual students. We have heard the concerns of New York's teachers and parents, and today's actions ensure that our classrooms are safe, stress-free environments that encourage creativity and critical thinking, rather than vehicles for a misguided one-size fits all approach.”

**Senator James Skoufis** said, “Four years ago, I voted against a draconian bill that tied teacher evaluations to high-stakes testing, an approach that isn’t indicative of an educator’s abilities and forces more teaching to the test. Today, we righted that wrong of 2015 and decoupled testing from evaluations. This important repeal demonstrates our new state Senate’s determination to return respect to the teaching profession.”

**Senator Toby Ann Stavisky** said, “Before my career in government, I was a high school teacher where a supervisor would come into the classroom and observe my lesson. I believe I should be evaluated by the Assistant Principal watching me teach the class, not by how my students did on an exam. Children who underperform on tests should be taught by master teachers. Judging teachers by students’ test scores will discourage the best teachers from teaching these students. I know this bill will allow for a more fair and effective evaluation system.”

**Senator Kevin Thomas** said, “I am proud to finally pass a repeal of the unfair coupling of student test scores and teacher evaluations. I honor and respect the hard work of teachers everywhere, and I recognize that community investment is more important than state dictates in building successful schools. This repeal will allow teachers and parents to work together in fostering a culture of learning, and it is a step in the right direction for the State of New York.”

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