

Dear Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg:

August 27, 2008

This letter was written in response to the earlier plan to test young children for entry into gifted and talented programs. We remained concerned even when the Chancellor announced he was cutting back on his plan, at least for the k-2 children (claiming financial reasons). Now it's back again in a new guise--as an experiment in tracking progress of children in K-2. Our original letter stated our unequivocal opposition to all testing of young children. A bad idea is a bad idea and we reiterate our opposition.

We continue to be alarmed by the NYC Department of Education's plans to test young children, first for entry into Gifted and Talented Programs and just a few months later as a "pilot" to track progress of children from grades k-2. We are equally alarmed by the use of standardized testing in general at ever earlier ages. We agree that the inequities experienced by far too many low income children and children of color, as well as the low expectations set for the vast majority of students, is cause for the most serious concern. Finding ways to best meet the learning needs of all children is our goal as much as yours. But we believe this policy is yet another serious step in the wrong direction and that money could be spent in far better ways to achieve optimal learning for all children. Rather than enhancing children's futures and achieving equity, as the Department of Education hopes, testing young children, whether for gifted classes or to track progress, most likely will further inequities and undermine educational opportunities for all children, by labeling the struggling children and lowering expectations. Learning in the youngest children is far more than can be measured on a pencil and paper test.

Why are we so strongly opposed to testing of K-2 children?

1. Young children are notoriously poor standardized test-takers. Many factors, such as attention to decontextualized tasks, disparate backgrounds, discomfort in strange settings or with unfamiliar adults, or just having a "bad day", can provoke wrong answers. When used with very young children, standardized tests are remarkably unreliable and, therefore, cannot provide valid predictions about those children's futures nor dictate decisions about what form of schooling or curriculum best suits them. Nor can they provide much information about the child's overall development.
2. Standardized test scores were never intended to lay the basis of long-term high stakes decisions for individual children, e.g., tracking kids into different educational paths. While the newest pilot assessment is stated to not be for making high stakes decisions, the potential is there when scores are recorded to follow a child over time. This is particularly problematic for children from racial minorities, and low income or recent immigrant families, since IQ scores are so highly correlated with family income.
3. Standardized tests and assessments have a long and infamous history of misrepresenting the intellectual potential of young children based on race, class, and immigrant status. They are particularly inappropriate tools in your efforts to achieve greater equity for all children.
4. The tests being used for G/T are intended to measure only certain aptitudes-- namely, verbal, quantitative, and spatial. Most researchers agree that there are important forms of intelligence/ability/talent beyond those measured on these tests. The repeated paper and pencil assessments are not reliable indicators in children this age of their full learning and take away from valuable learning time where teachers can build meaningful relationships

with children- a predictor of positive learning outcomes.

5. Tests used for tracking children, whether in the guise of curriculum planning or for high-stakes purposes are likely to result in long-term negative and potentially dangerous consequences. The ongoing use of information obtained on these tests can undermine our high expectations for all, and reinforce longstanding low expectations for precisely those children at most risk in our schools.

We call upon you and the Department of Education to stop using such tests to either track progress or make critical decisions for young children, starting at kindergarten. We ask you to follow the nearly universal advice of the educational research and practice communities with respect to not measuring, labeling or tracking young children on the basis of IQ tests and other unsound forms of standardized testing or assessments. This is not a means of achieving the equity in public education that we all want for our children.

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