

Press Conference: **Time Out From Testing**
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Statement by Dr. Charles Fowler
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Dr. Haney has shared with you the overall statistics showing the impact of New York's high stakes testing. Teachers and parents know the names and faces behind the statistics; it is not a pretty picture. Consider Amy, arriving in this country in the middle of her junior year from an eastern European country, never having studied English. After a year and one half she passed both the math and social studies Regents, as well as earning a good enough SAT score to be accepted in college. She couldn't, however, get a passing grade on an English Regents examination (despite 3 tries). She had all the credits she needed for graduation, just couldn't pass one test. She couldn't go on to college, didn't want to spend another year in high school just to pass one test, so she went to work and deferred her college dream.

Phil lives in a small rural community upstate and showed every promise of being the first in his family to earn his high school diploma—both parents dropped out before graduation as did his older sister. Going into his senior year, his credits and grades were fine. Passing a math Regents exam was a problem for him. He could demonstrate his knowledge of the math through his vocational program, and he could complete math projects independently—he just “froze” on every math exam. In the June he was to graduate, he missed a passing score on the Regents by 1 point, despite volunteer teacher tutors and the whole school rooting for him. The superintendent told me that when word got out about his score, the whole school, including his teachers, was in tears. The last I knew, Phil had gone to work and promised to, some day, try to get a GED.

The tragedy of these stories lies not only in the lives of these young people being needlessly sidetracked, but in the fact that they are the victims of a testing system that has run amuck with what the State itself describes as “flawed” exams. Prior to the introduction of these make-it or break-it high stakes exams, students received credits for their high school diploma based on multiple forms of assessment: grades on homework, class work, class projects, class exams, term papers and, yes, a local or Regents Exam final. These scores were all averaged together to determine whether the student passed the course or not. Frequently the Regents Exam score was weighted the most, 20% of the final grade, but never 100%.

Why not, because exams are only one form of measuring what a student knows and is able to do. With their entire future now tied to test results alone, students are becoming physically ill when taking exams, breaking down in tears during the tests, walking out of exams when they become discouraged by a few questions, and dropping out of school. The exams are riddled with errors in questions and in scoring methodology. Every year, principals get a half dozen to dozen emergency memos from Albany saying things like, “The correct answer to Question #5 does not appear among the answers; give credit for

any answer the student gives” or “There were two correct answers for Question #4; give credit for either answer “a” or “d”. That’s all well and good for the Albany bureaucrat to try to fix his error, but consider what a student is going through when he knows his graduation depends on the score on this test alone, and he knows the correct answer but it doesn’t even appear as a choice. Students, literally, become hysterical when they are put through this kind of stress.

We need a Time Out from this over-emphasis on testing, while we restore balance, accuracy, and sanity to the system by which we award high school diplomas. Three million school children in New York State are depending on their legislators to rescue them from this testing madness. Please.

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