

An open letter about testing: what parents and community members need to know

Next month, our students in grades 3-8 will take state tests based on the new Common Core standards adopted by the State Education Department. Parents and educators have raised serious concerns about the timing and preparation for these new standardized exams. As president of NYSUT, I am writing to let you know why teachers are so concerned.

Let me be clear: Teachers support the principle of Common Core standards. Done right, implementation of quality Common Core standards can enrich and expand student learning, critical thinking and creativity.

And we fully support the principle of accountability for students and educators. Done right, standardized tests can be one of many measures that can strengthen teaching and learning.

But the problem is: **Testing in New York state isn't being done right.**

No experienced teacher would test students on material before it's been taught — and yet that's the scenario the state has created in its rush to roll out new standardized tests. Two-thirds of teachers surveyed statewide say their students lack books and materials aligned with the new Common Core standards. As recently as last month, the state was still rolling out materials and instructions on Common Core, while expecting students to have mastered new curriculum by April. Too many students have not had time to prepare for what will be a whole new set of challenging standardized exams in math and English Language Arts. Not surprisingly, everyone from U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan to State Education Commissioner John King has acknowledged that students' test scores will likely drop significantly — some estimates say up to 30 percent. Yet the state is allowing this year's scores to be used to unfairly label students and to inaccurately measure teacher effectiveness.

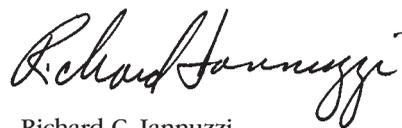
As parents know, it's wrong to impose "high stakes" on too many tests, given too frequently, and before teachers have had the opportunity to properly prepare their students. It's wrong for children to come home crying after taking a test. Thousands of educators are "telling it like it is" and sharing these concerns about student stress and anxiety in detailed, heart-felt letters to Commissioner King and the Regents.

Here's what we're saying: Let's get this right.

Patience, time and resources are required to implement new and challenging Common Core standards. This year's exams should be used to measure the state's progress in introducing Common Core standards — not for high-stakes decisions.

Just like you, educators support high standards. **Our commitment is to get it done right.**

Respectfully,



Richard C. Iannuzzi
President, New York State United Teachers

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