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Thank you for the opportunity to share my observations of the effects of the New York State Regents Reform Agenda on schooling in New York City. I am a former early childhood teacher, music teacher, and assistant principal. I am currently an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the College of Staten Island and Coordinator of the Post Masters Advanced Certificate Program for Leadership in Education. I am therefore going to address the influence of the Reform Agenda on preparation of school leaders.

The school leader is responsible for all three of the issues under discussion here today, implementation of common core standards, state and local assessments, and the protection of student privacy. However, high stakes testing is the central issue because it is driving the others, and high stakes testing is destroying school leaders' ability to create the kind of culture students and teachers need to do their best work. It is this work for which we prepare school leaders. This will therefore be my focus.

I began teaching school leadership in 2000. I love being an educator; spending my days trying to enhance the lives of children has always been a source of joy and satisfaction. I moved to leadership development because I wanted to work with teachers in their efforts to become leaders with the vision and skills necessary for learning and people-centered schools. Our leadership program students write essays about their visions when they enter and when they leave. I wish you could read all of them. They write about creating places where children are eager to come to school and provided with varied opportunities to learn; where teachers want to come to work and collaborate with colleagues; where parents feel like welcome members of the teaching and learning team.

At the College of Staten Island, we have spent many years creating a leadership program that incorporates developing learning communities based on trust, facilitating collaboration among teachers, parents, and administration, support of teachers that improves instruction, and most of all, reflection. Research is clear; schools do not continuously improve without all of these. Preparation for school leadership includes learning strategies and processes for all of this crucial work.

Unfortunately, I am sending my graduates out into positions where they are unlikely to be able to do these things. They are going into a system dominated by an obsession with test scores. They will have to base decisions about students on their test scores and they will have to support teachers with an evaluation system largely based on test scores. They will have to communicate with parents about their children's test scores. Principals began this year with the task of telling most parents

that their children had failed, because of the administration of last year's tests that the Department of Education now admits they knew most students would fail. If their schools get poor grades, which are largely determined by test scores, their schools may be closed and the communities they have worked so hard with to make a safe and learning-full environment for students will be dissolved. The pressures of the tests may crowd out the things they hoped to do when they decided to become leaders. It is nearly impossible to be the nurturing principal, the principal who has vision, courage, and stamina, in a test-obsessed system. I have to ask, "Am I meeting my responsibility to my students if I don't focus on practices designed to increase test scores?" This is not what I envisioned when I chose to prepare school leaders.

Under the recent, test-based reforms, teachers and schools are evaluated largely by their test scores. In order to raise test scores, principals are directed to direct teachers to focus on the "bottom third;" these students' scores need to come up the most. The "data" determines the students and learning issues deserving most attention. The teacher---and parent, and principal---may know the students, and know that although Ben did well on the test, he needs more and different learning activities. They will sandwich in the time and effort to help Ben in and around the time and effort required to raise the scores of the bottom third. With test scores as the driver, authentic learning is not the focus for all students, teachers are frustrated, and principals must try to overcome all of this to maintain a culture of learning. With the implementation of the Common Core and all of its problems including standardization for non-standardized learners and contexts, the tests have changed, and there is likely to be a new "bottom third" whose test scores, not learning, will be the focus. The teachers and leaders I know are continuing to support students using their professional expertise while they work to move test scores through test preparation, but they are exhausted. They are trying to do two different jobs in one day.

It is not surprising that test scores are driving what happens in the school and in the classroom when they determine the fates of students, teachers, principals, and schools. The mathematics of the test score component of the teacher evaluation---40%---needs explanation. Students' "growth" scores, or the amount their scores went up relative to students in the same peer group, are percentiles. The percentiles are averaged, and that number is assigned to the teacher. Then the teachers are percentile ranked based on the average percentile of the students, and the average of those numbers is assigned to the principal. If you find this confusing, you are not alone. All of these numbers lead to a student's retention in grade (even if the teacher believes the student has mastered more than was indicated on the test), dismissal of teachers, and closing of schools. Percentile ranks are, by definition, competitive. Someone comes out on top and someone is at the bottom. High stakes tests with public display of teacher and school rankings does not encourage collaboration. This environment makes it easy to understand why test scores are on everyone's minds most of the time.

Simply put, effective principals work with teachers and provide time and space for teachers to work together to solve complex problems of instruction, knowing who the students are and what they need. When students are not demonstrating appropriate writing skills, teachers need to have time to analyze the problem by collecting and looking at student work together. They can look to professional standards as a guide, and then use their professional knowledge to formulate a strategy to assist students having difficulty. When learning is approached this way, a way that is only possible if the principal creates a climate of mutual respect and provides time and space, teachers are eager to employ new strategies. These are strategies they, not policymakers, designed with knowledge of their students as well as the content. There is “buy-in” because they created the strategies themselves. The principal and the teachers are members of a team, working together for the benefit of these students at this school in this community.

Schools are families, so the leader must also provide caring support to teachers who spend 180 days per year with 25-250 students as not only their teachers, but also their caregivers, mentors, allies. I visit schools weekly, and I see students coming in with stories about everything from losing a tooth or getting new sneakers to witnessing a shooting or moving for the fifth time this year. Student needs haven't changed just because decisions about their lives are made on the basis of test scores. They need the calm and caring support of their teachers as much as they ever have, and teachers who feel supported by their leadership are more equipped to support students.

But testing and other mandated reforms are strangling principals' ability to enact and sustain these practices. With the Annual Professional Performance Review mandated by New York State as part of its Race to the Top commitments, principals must observe teachers six times---if they choose “option 2”---with a planning conference, feedback session, report, and data entry. That means that a school with 20 teachers is going to require 120 conferences, 120 observations, 120 feedback sessions, and 120 reports entered into the data system. After all of this, if a teacher's students' test scores don't go up enough, he or she will receive an ineffective rating even if the principal knows that the teacher is moving students toward mastery at the rate appropriate for the group. Two years of ineffective ratings---low percentile increases in test scores--- can mean a teacher's removal. Two years of low percentile increases for a school leads to a school improvement plan which, in New York City, often means closure. Where does the shared, joint reflection on practice fit in? Time is finite. If we are doing one thing we're not doing something else.

All of this is made worse by the fact that test scores are an invalid measure of learning. Many students know more (or less) than they show on a test. Add a cold, a noisy classroom, a lost best friend---and his or her “growth score” is too low for

promotion, too low for the teacher to get an effective rating, and too low for the principal to keep the school open. Combine this with Campbell's Law--"The more any quantitative social indicator (or even some qualitative indicator) is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" and it is clear that we have an entire system based on a false metric. We are measuring the effectiveness of test prep materials, not learning.

Accountability is an economic term, just as Race to the Top is an economic package, intended to "increase productivity." I prefer "responsibility." We teach our developing leaders that they are responsible for the safety and learning of their students. We teach them that they are responsible for providing teachers with the support they need to do the difficult and emotional work of understanding and meeting the needs of children. We teach them that they are responsible for the development of children and teenagers who want to come to school, and are able to continue learning new life, work, and interpersonal skills throughout their lives. The education system currently tells them that they are accountable for numbers and spreadsheets. Our job is in danger of becoming teaching future principals test prep strategies, how to crunch data, and how to keep everyone focused on test results. If things continue as they are now, I will also need to teach strategies for retaining good teachers who are demoralized and frustrated by a system where they can't use their knowledge and skills to create engaging lessons, lessons which are fun to teach and make for great learning. We have succeeded, so far, in maintaining a program focus on reflection, collaboration, and shared responsibility for learning. But I know that when our graduates get that first position, they are going to find that their visions of places of engaged and exciting and joyful learning are not welcome, and that there is little time to use practices learned in our program. This is particularly true in neighborhood schools where many students are challenged by conditions outside of the school building. We know that these are the schools where test scores largely reflective of the students' poverty level will need to go up substantially if the school is to stay open. Leaders committed to these communities are caught between two responsibilities; raising test scores however they can, and providing learning experiences that promote deep understanding. Ten years ago, leaders who graduated our program and came back to visit shared their challenges and successes and satisfaction with their decision to move from the classroom to leadership. Since the implementation of the Race to the Top Regents Reform agenda, they tell us, when we ask "how is it going?"--- "well, you know how it is out there....."

We are losing a generation of children and teens to a world of numbers, pressure, and compliance, and I am losing potentially innovative, caring, and committed leaders. If school leaders could focus their energies on creating and supporting relationships, the foundation of all learning and growth, building trust, facilitating collaboration among teachers and students, and working with families, we would move closer to where we need to be than we are getting with schooling driven by testing. We need accountability, but we need both a clear vision of what we want schools to be accountable *for* and a valid and reliable way of assessing progress

toward our shared goals. We have neither. I propose that, as an alternative to testing, we use the same money we are paying for all of the costs associated with testing to compensate teachers for meeting regularly to look at, analyze, and evaluate student work. With the authentic knowledge gained from such a process, they will be able to make adjustments to curriculum that will increase learning for all students, and provide information to families about student progress. The principal's role will be to make sure that the building is physically and emotionally safe for students, teachers, and families and to make arrangements for space, needed materials for curricular improvements, and development sessions targeted for teachers' areas of need. The leader can set the tone for relationships and interactions that maintain a focus on the joy of learning for all. Such an approach requires time, patience, courage, a relentless determination to maintain a positive climate, and reflection that can lead to a sense of accomplishment when students are learning, growing, and happy. I will prepare leaders ready to meet the challenges of continuous student, teacher, and school growth. I implore you to reverse the current test-driven course so that my graduates can do this work.

Respectfully submitted 10/24/2013