

# Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma

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## Statement of Purpose

The Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma is comprised of more than 70 members, including advocacy organizations, educators and families across New York State, representing a broad cross-section of students, including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students who are overage and under-credited, and economically disadvantaged students. We have come together to urge the creation of a coherent and comprehensive New York State graduation structure that includes multiple pathways to a diploma, each of which holds all students to high expectations, provides them with quality instruction, and opens doors to career and post-secondary education opportunities. We are united by the concern that high-stakes standardized exit exams act as an unnecessary barrier to high school graduation for students who have otherwise mastered New York State standards and are college- or career-ready. We believe that measuring college- and career-readiness requires valuing multiple and equally valid ways to assess the skills needed for success in the workplace and higher education and supporting a diversity of learning styles and goals. We are also united by the concern that access to many instructional programs/pathways, such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) and work-based learning, which have been shown to improve student engagement and reduce dropout rates, has been limited for many students.

## Members of the Coalition Include:

Advocates for Children of New York • Alliance for Quality Education • ARISE Coalition • Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association • David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center • Bronx Independent Living Services • Brooklyn Defender Services • Brooklyn Center for the Disabled • Business Teachers Association of New York State • Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce • Capital Region Refugee Roundtable • Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York • Citizens' Committee for Children of New York • Lisa Finnerty Coggi, Parent/Advocate • Community Service Society • Council for a Strong America • Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies • Valerie DeClara, Parent • Della DeKay JD, EdD • Max Donatelli, Family Advocate • Eskolta School Research and Design • Irja Estrella, Parent • Families Together in New York State • Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Parent • Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project • Jennifer Ghidiu, Big Picture Learning • Michael Godino, Advocate • Good Shepherd Services • Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate • Lorri Gumanow, Parent/Special Educator • Meghan Healy • Shelley Hubal, Parent • INCLUDEnyc • Muronji Inman-McCraw • Internationals Network for Public Schools • Lawyers for Children, Inc. • Learning Disabilities Association of New York State • Jill Lewis-Flood, Parent/PIP Member • Long Island Advocacy Center • Long Island Communities of Practice • Chris McNell, Special Education Supervisor/Principal • Diana Medina Mendez, Parent • Mark Anthony Mendez • Mental Health Association of New York City • Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools • Namita Modasra • New York Council of Administrators of Special Education • New York Immigration Coalition • New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation • New York Performance Standards Consortium • New York State Association for Bilingual Education • New York State Coalition of 853 Schools • New York State Community of Practice on Family, School and Community Collaboration • New York State Disabilities Advocacy Association and Network • New York State Independent Living Council, Inc. (NYSILC) • New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYTESOL) • NY Stop Grad HST • NYU Metro Center • Regina Paleau, Parent • Parent to Parent New York, Inc. • Evelyn Perez, Parent • Catherine Phillips-Russ, Baker Victory Services • Sharon Poole, Education for Everyone Consultant • Queens Community House • Lynn Russo, Parent • SCO Family of Services • Tracey Shannon, Parent • Bruce A. Shields, PhD, Associate Professor of Education, Daemen College • Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center • Starbridge • Amy Ming Tsai, Parent/Advocate for Special Education • United We Stand • Christian Villenas, PhD • Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate • Randy K. Young, Long Island Communities of Practice/Partners in Inclusivity, Inc. • YOUTH POWER!

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## Policy Goals

We call upon the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents to take the following steps in support of multiple pathways to a diploma:

- 1. Establish a commission to reexamine existing graduation pathways and options to develop a coherent system of diploma pathways.** The Commission should be coordinated by NYSED and must consist of current or recent students, parents, educators, researchers, advocates and business leaders. The Commission must include individuals with experience with learners with disabilities, multilingual learners and overage and under-credited students and with expertise in the development and implementation of work-based learning, career and technical education and performance-based assessment systems. Input from these stakeholders is critical to creating a graduation system that is fair and comprehensible and that meets the needs of all learners.

**The Commission's recommendations should include plans to:**

- **Build coherence and transparency into the multiple pathways system by engaging diverse stakeholders.** The current system, evolving out of a series of emergency measures, has become too complex for most students, families, and even school professionals to navigate. The system is now unduly cumbersome and relies heavily on appeals and disability-only safety nets. Any new system must be thoughtful and coherent and must provide opportunities for stakeholder feedback before any new plan is brought to the Board of Regents for a vote.
- **Align graduation requirements with the real-world skills required for success in college and career.** The Commission should identify the skills, knowledge and experiences critical for post-secondary success and should design a coherent system for students to demonstrate that they have achieved such benchmarks. The group's task should not merely be to review exit exam requirements; it should review each of the State's current exit credentials and diplomas, including the coursework and exit exams required for each. From this, the Commission should identify the changes necessary to create a system of graduation options and pathways that are equitable and accessible and that communicate meaningful skills to colleges and employers.
- **Develop and support performance-based assessments.** In lieu of each exit exam, all students should be given the option to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through State-approved, stakeholder-developed performance-based assessments or State-approved performance-based assessment systems, completing a series of tasks/projects in contexts that are familiar and relevant to their high school experiences. Schools with demonstrated capacity to develop and implement performance-based systems should continue to be supported. We recommend that the Commission consult with educators in New York State already using performance-based assessments, review the experiences of other states that have provided students with performance-based options in lieu of standardized tests, and make recommendations that include procedures and funding for developing and approving performance-based assessments for all students.
- **Create pathways to graduation for all students that require no more than two exit exams.** Although the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to assess high school students in reading/language arts, math, and science for the purposes of state accountability, no federal law requires students to pass exit exams to graduate. In fact, only 12 states currently require students to pass exit exams to graduate from high school. Of these states, New York has some of

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the most onerous testing requirements. The Commission should examine the 38 states with no exit exam requirements and consider whether any exit exam is necessary for New York students who have otherwise demonstrated mastery of State standards. Our coalition recommends that New York require no more than one English assessment and one Math assessment for graduation. Other Regents exams could remain available for students who choose to take them to graduate with Honors or an Advanced Regents Diploma and could be used for school accountability purposes, but should not serve as a barrier to graduation for any student.

- **Make all pathways available to all students.** New York's current pathways system relies heavily on disability-only exceptions and fails to acknowledge that all students need access to a variety of opportunities to demonstrate readiness to graduate. For example, students with IEPs can currently demonstrate readiness for graduation without passing any Regents exams, while students with 504 plans and those without disabilities must pass at least 4 Regents exams. The Commission's recommendations should break down these walls between student populations whenever possible by creating opportunities for all students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge without forcing them to pass high-stakes tests.
  - **Use the IEP process to ensure that students with disabilities get the supports and guidance they need to meet graduation requirements.** Rather than relying on disability-only pathways to address the significant gap in graduation rates between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, the Commission should make recommendations to ensure that students with disabilities get the academic and transition supports they need to access each graduation pathway.
  - **Ensure access for all students to emerging instructional programming and graduation pathways.** As the State looks to expand pathways to graduation that require work-based learning, as well as instruction in Career and Technical Education, the arts, humanities, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and other programs shown to promote student engagement and advancement towards college or career readiness, it must ensure that such programs are accessible to diverse student populations, including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students who are overage and under-credited.
- 2. Ensure access for all to the current multiple pathways system.** It is critical that students at all schools have access to each graduation option and pathway, including those that rely on work-based learning and CTE. Therefore, the State must also provide families, students and educators with the information and resources they need to make all emerging pathways and options available to all eligible students, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students who are overage and under-credited.
- 3. Promote transparency and monitor all aspects of the current multiple pathways system.**
- **Information:** Communication is vital for ensuring student access to any existing pathway, including the increasingly-complex appeals, safety nets, and superintendent determinations currently available to students. The State must provide students, families, and school professionals clear, concise, and easy-to-follow information on all of the alternative pathways and options that are available to students to receive a high school diploma.
  - **Outcomes:** Monitoring student outcomes with respect to each pathway is crucial to guarantee that the pathways are implemented correctly and fairly. In order to promote accountability, the State must collect and disclose detailed outcomes data, including usage data on the specific diplomas and the pathways that students have taken to earn them, as well as data that allow for comparison of outcomes across multiple student groups.