NY Inspires Needs a Two-Year Pause for a Better Rollout Plan

The undersigned organizations and individuals urge New York State leaders to pause the implementation of NY Inspires for two years. Through NY Inspires, the New York State Department of Education's (NYSED) plans to redefine how the state assesses the graduation readiness of its 2.2 million students through competency-based learning.

Our organizations support the goals of NY Inspires. We believe every New York student should have access to engaging learning opportunities that develop the skills and dispositions outlined in NYSED's Portrait of a Graduate Framework. We also support efforts to eventually replace Regents exams with more innovative ways to measure proficiency while balancing rigor and flexibility, particularly for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

However, we have deep concerns about the current roll-out of NY Inspires. New York's current K-12 system is not prepared to implement the sweeping changes to teaching, learning and assessment that NY Inspires requires in an equitable way. These challenges pose particular risks for districts that already struggle to help students meet proficiency standards in math and reading. For example, on the most recent New York State assessments, only 47% of 8th graders were proficient in math, and only 53% were proficient in reading, meaning that just under or over half of all 8th graders are entering high school below grade level in math and reading.

NYSED has also failed to explain how it will establish clear, consistent, and equitable standards for determining whether students have the skills they need to succeed after high school. The department has not provided districts with sufficient clarity, guidance, or time to prepare for changes scheduled to begin in less than a year.

Without strong safeguards and well-developed policies, NY Inspires could produce unintended consequences that deepen inequities and weaken academic rigor. Other states have encountered these problems when pursuing similar reforms. Several have scaled back or reconsidered their approaches after implementation challenges and evidence that graduation requirements lacked sufficient rigor, particularly for communities that serve predominately students from low-income backgrounds.

Pennsylvania offers a cautionary example. In 2022, the state moved away from exit exams and allowed students to demonstrate readiness through multiple measures, including external assessments and industry credentials. This approach has contributed to massive disparities. Affluent districts and schools overwhelmingly rely on using standardized assessments to demonstrate readiness while high-need districts have turned to less rigorous alternatives. In

Philadelphia, for example, 40% of students used online industry credentials, including a 2-hour online ladder-safety credential, to demonstrate their graduation readiness.

These disparities raise serious concerns for New York, where more than 700 districts face substantial differences in resource and educational opportunity gaps.

Before moving forward with NY Inspires, NYSED, the Board of Regents, and other state leaders must develop an equitable, rigorous implementation plan that builds the capacity of educators responsible for making the initiative successful. The state must also establish a credible, statewide alternative for measuring college and career readiness before it removes Regents exams from graduation requirements.

Given these concerns, we recommend a two-year pause in NY Inspires implementation. Before resuming implementation, we urge state leaders to complete the following actions:

1) Convene a statewide task force to develop a comprehensive implementation framework.

The Board of Regents, SUNY and CUNY, and the Governor should convene a state-level task force that builds on the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. The task force should develop:

1. Statewide indicators of college and career readiness, that establish clear expectations for student success after high school.

2. A range of proficiency measures aligned with the Portrait of a Graduate competencies and the statewide readiness indicators, with particular attention to the needs of students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

3. A data system to assess each school district's readiness to implement the new graduation requirements.

4. A coherent implementation plan that establishes a process for districts to submit locally developed graduation requirement plans.

5. A multi-year implementation strategy that gives districts sufficient time and support to implement the new requirements while regularly validating student outcomes and assessing implementation fidelity.

2) Finalize and publish learning rubrics.

NYSED should finalize and publish learning rubrics aligned with the competencies outline in the Portrait of a Graduate.

3) Establish a dedicated NY Inspires implementation team.

NYSED should create a NY Inspires team to review and approve district plans, regularly assess student outcomes and implementation fidelity, and help districts design and implement performance-based assessments.

4) Provide resources and implementation support to districts and schools.

NYSED should provide the funding, tools, guidance, and professional learning opportunities that districts and schools need to implement NY Inspires successfully in classrooms. The department should pay particular attention to districts and schools that use performance-based assessments to ensure rigor and comparability across schools and districts.

Alongside these recommendations, we urge state leaders to prioritize the foundational reading and math skills that every student needs to succeed in high school and beyond. The state must ensure that students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners receive the instruction and support they need to meet these expectations.

Changing how we measure student achievement will not, by itself, solve the challenges our schools face. New York must address those challenges directly while ensuring that any new graduation framework promotes equity, maintains rigor, and prepares every student for success.

Our students deserve diplomas that reflect their readiness for what comes next. Our organizations look forward to working with stakeholders across the state to address this critical issue in the coming months and years.

Sincerely,

EdTrust-New York
Educators for Excellence
United Way of New York City
We the Parents of Western New York
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families
Ibero-American Action League, Inc.
Capital Region Chamber
Let's Get L.I.T. (Liberating Individuals Through Literary Texts)
StudentsFirstNY
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