

**Public Hearing
Regents Learning Standards
and High School Graduation Requirements**

**NY State Standing Committee on Education
NYC, October 15, 2003**

**Testimony submitted by Catherine DeLaura
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The School of the Future believes in high standards and graduation requirements. We have spent the last 10 years developing a rigorous exhibition process that holds our students accountable on many levels. The year-long exhibition process is a reflection of the class curriculum explored on a much deeper level. Students have to do one exhibition a year; one each in math and science, and 2 in Humanities. In November the students choose what will be their focus for that year and the appropriate subject teacher becomes their sponsor for that year's exhibition. The sponsor works with the students helping them develop an essential question such as:

- Is there any scientific basis for the concept of race?
- Does cancer treatment sustain or drain the quality of life?
- Why are Mathematics and Physics Vital to Projectile Motion?
- How were the Border States affected by the Civil War?

And then the sponsor continues to help the students with research, experiments, and interviews with experts in the field. Students then write an 8 - 20 page paper with adequate evidence to defend their point of view, show the significance of the topic, and make connections to other fields. The paper must be written to demonstrate the fallacies of alternative points of view and in a logical, grammatically correct style using MLA format. A first draft is handed in March and read by another faculty member and given back to the sponsor with feedback based on the rubric. Students continue to work on the paper until a final deadline at the end of May. They then prepare a presentation to defend their work before 2 teachers, 2 students and community members. Students whose papers are not ready are asked to work on them over the summer and present them at the beginning of the next year. This is an authentic assessment and rigorous process!!

We would fail to teach students a strong work ethic if they were allowed to coast the entire year and then take a 3-hour exam that counts toward graduation and in many schools permits them to pass the class. Our students are taught that only through planning and hard work they will be successful as they move on to college and into the world of work after 2 internships and 4 years of math and science compared to the 3 years of the New York State standards. If the purpose of our classes is to "teach to the test" we are

telling our students that richness of curriculum and a variety of viewpoints are not important. SOF prides itself on the richness and diversity of its curricula. As a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools we emphasize "student as work" rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Our method is designed to teach students how to learn and thus how to teach themselves. Students should be allowed to discover things for themselves and not be constrained by "drill and kill" rote learning. Our teachers give exams and our students in fact do well on the standardized SAT exams, but we don't want this to be the main goal of our curricula.

Our multiple methods of assessment allow us to create personalized instruction that meets the individual needs and interests of our students. In the past my teachers and I were able to spend time developing the exhibition process and improving the sponsors role throughout the school. There was constant development of rigorous rubrics and inter-reliability of readers. But now I must devote some of our precious professional development time to the Regents. My teachers are forced to compromise their rich, creative curricula with test prep material.

When our alumni return from schools like Stanford, USC, Middlebury, Lafayette, and Columbia they say that the Exhibition really prepared them for college. Their fellow students are struggling with long assignments, whereas SOF students already have acquired the habits of mind to be successful. None of them say they are really glad they took the ELA exam, or that the critical lens essay was an authentic assessment that is helping them with their college work.

I end where I began. The School of the Future believes in high standards and graduation requirements. Like many of the schools in the New York Performance Standards Consortium we have developed rigorous, authentic assessment tools that work for our students. We would like to continue doing what we do best and not be constrained by the test prep demands of the numerous Regents exams.