

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

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

**Testimony submitted by Peter Negron  
Student at Urban Academy**

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Good morning everyone who has attended this hearing in hopes to finally solve this matter at hand.

I am Peter Negron a student at Urban Academy Laboratory High School; I am sixteen years old and am a Hispanic American. I have been going to alternative schools all my life and this fact has indeed sculpted my mentality and how I look at the world as a whole. Since I can remember I have been taught to not accept the obvious, but dig beneath the surface through research, analytical study, and criticizing every piece of information that is given to me. The schooling I have received has challenged me to a point where I have to grow and progress as an intellectual. It's easy for a teacher to give a student a book and say read it, and write a paper summarizing what the book is about. The teacher should be asking questions like: "What is the social relevance of this book?" "What was the author's intention by writing this book?" Questions like these would force students to examine the story instead of simply skimming the surface. Understanding something is where true learning occurs, because that requires skill.

At Urban, one of our Proficiencies or performance-based assessments is creative arts. For this Proficiency you can do many things, you can paint, write, and any other thing that might be art, I chose to write a play. I wrote this play in a class called Plays and Playwriting the introduction course, and wrote a comedy about two boys who get themselves into mischief. I passed that course and a year later when the advanced course was offered I took it and decided to write another play to acquire my proficiency in creative arts. It was a yearlong process with many revisions and going to see professional plays in both the intro and advanced course. Working with the Manhattan Theater Club who provides these classes at my school, I was able to get my play to exactly where it needed to be, to be proficient. The task of writing this play was very difficult because I had to endure several criticisms and come up with a story that was actually entertaining. However, when I was finished with it I was very proud, and felt that I had actually accomplish something, and tapped into skills of mine that were dormant. Because of this class I have continued to write, not plays, but I have begun to write a book. The work I have done has inspired me in a way that no other high school could have possibly done. This school has shown me an outlet that I might pursue in college as a major, and possibly, as a career in life.

Ultimately high schools are supposed to prepare you for college, but are Regents based

schools letting this happen? I, and others from schools like mine which use performance-based assessment are living proof that this type of teaching we're exposed to are preparing us more thoroughly for college than a Regents based system will ever do. Now, when you place a student that is so accustomed to memorizing and summarizing information, how can you expect them to be prepared for the type of analytical papers they'll be required to write when they reach college? Of course students will have to adapt, but students shouldn't have to learn how to think in college, and that's what's happening. I have these skills, and so do the other students that attend schools that are part of the consortium. We can be put to the test and you will see without a doubt that we are better prepared for college than students that come from Regents based schools.

We have reached a point in history where learning has been removed from the classrooms of traditional schools. What has happened is that instead of absorbing, analyzing, and criticizing information, students are being conditioned to memorize data without true understanding of it in order to pass a test. The system creates robots that can only think in such a limited fashion that it's scary. It has become secondary for students to reach their full potential, but only achieve the bare minimum and move on.

The curriculum has become so monotonous that both teachers and students are unenthusiastic about school altogether, which causes a high drop out rate and produces teachers who don't care.

This reality has been caused by a test that puts such tight restrictions on what a student can learn and what a teacher can teach. All that matters in this system of the Regents is passing the test. So students don't have to be ambitious or eager to improve themselves academically when all they have to do is pass a test with a 55 and be done with high school. Regents count for such a large percentage of whether a student can graduate that grades in a class become devalued, which is ridiculous. So what does that say about the Regents and what will become of these students if this system is not changed immediately? Personally I'm concerned for the future of this city and its educational system. What will become of schools like mine if Regents curriculums take over? The teaching that so many others and I have come to love will disappear and students like myself will become just another test score.

Thank you.