

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

**NY State Standing Committee on Education
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My high school science classes on Long Island consisted of sitting with thirty-four other students while the teacher lectured us on topics that seemed irrelevant and unconnected to my life. The culmination of each science class was the Regents examination that seemed to test my ability to memorize isolated facts and remain calm in the face of pressure. I managed to pass these exams, the state's golden benchmark for mastering content, but I quickly learned in college how the high school curriculum which had prepared me so well to pass the Regents, had not picked up on the fact that I had absolutely no understanding of basic scientific principles and how they can be applied to real life. Through discussion, extensive reading, presentations, internships and creative assessment tasks that pushed my limits, I grew to understand that science was much more than vocabulary and memorization.

My personal academic journey led me to teaching, and it impressed upon me an intense conviction to develop a class environment in which deep understanding occurred, not just the visceral learning that allows many students to skate through high school, but leaves them completely unprepared for the rigors of college and life as an adult. I was excited to develop curriculum that I felt would engage the multiple and diverse skills of my students, and to create meaningful assessments that reflected the curriculum and whether or not I had delivered it well.

I brought these expectations into the classroom as a student teacher, where I had the opportunity to work with an excellent mentoring teacher. She was struggling to maintain creativity, cooperative learning and multiple assessments in her curriculum, while having to prepare students for the Regents for the first time in her eight year teaching career. It was a balance between an environment that fostered learning and one in which high stress and frustration could easily dictate the curriculum.

I was shocked that an opportunity to discuss the untimely death of Dolly the cloned sheep was passed up so that students could learn that if two choices in a multiple choice question are the same, you can eliminate both of them. I could feel the frustration in a student when he answered a question incorrectly, only to find out he understood and could recall the concept, but had been tricked by ambiguous wording. I realized that the whole class could not recognize half of the words in one particular question. By the time June came, students were angry and disenfranchised with a system that didn't seem to

accurately assess their skills and appeared to them to make graduating from high school, an absolutely daunting and unpleasant task.

While developing a curriculum as a first year teacher, I am blessed with a school in which everyone is dedicated to the same principles of teaching that I have. The collective support reassures me that the Regents do not and should not shape curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Nonetheless, I feel tremendous pressure by this one, three hour exam, because it will dictate my students' success in life. Professionally, it also becomes a reflection of me as a teacher and of the school where I am fortunate enough to work. As a first year teacher, the biggest challenge has been not letting the Regents exam deflate my enthusiasm to finally get into the classroom.

Young adults do not learn to succeed in life by failing. They must be given multiple and diverse chances to succeed at tasks that are fair to them and their teachers. Being required to pass five standardized exams in order to graduate frustrates and alienates students. It discourages us as teachers who would like to develop academic and thought provoking curriculum. It forces us to turn more and more to assessment tasks throughout the year that prepare the students to take the Regents, leaving us unable to assess students' ability to convey verbally, artistically and practically, what they know. In my case, passing the Regents did not ensure that I really understood biology, chemistry and physics. But much more importantly, having high stakes Regents exams may prevent those students who understand science, math, history and English better than I did but who are unable to perform well on the tests, to have the opportunities that they deserve.