

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

**NY State Standing Committee on Education
NYC, September 23, 2003**

**Testimony submitted by Eliabeth Manne
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Good morning Chairman Saland. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify today on the subject of the Regents' Exams. My name is Elizabeth Manne. I come to speak with you today in my capacity as a New York City businessperson concerned about the future of our community, concerned about the negative impact of these mandatory high stakes tests, not only in the classroom, but indeed throughout our society.

I am President of my own company, Duopoly Inc. We provide marketing and business strategy consulting for the media and entertainment industry. HBO is one of our many clients. I am former Co-Founder and Executive Vice President of Marketing of Fine Line Features, a division of AOL-Time Warner, and previously served as Executive Vice President Programming & Marketing of Sundance Channel, a division of Viacom. I received my MBA from New York University's Leonard M. Stern School of Business, and I currently sit on the advisory board of Stern's Entertainment, Media and Technology Program. I am also a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences -you know -the folks that give out the Oscars every year. I have been a senior executive and entrepreneur in New York's media and entertainment business for over 20 years.

My hands-on involvement with public education in the state of New York dates back four years, when I became a volunteer with the Principal for a Day program run by PENCIL, a not-for-profit organization whose acronym stands for *Public Education Needs Civic Involvement in Learning*. PENCIL's mission is one I couldn't agree with more: the private sector must play a vital role in improving the quality of education for our public school students. In New York City alone that number is 1.1 million kids. These kids are our community, our family members, our neighbors, our customers, our interns, our future employees; in fact, any one of them might be our future bosses or elected officials, our future visionaries and leaders. In business, we must continually invest in our future. And these public school students ARE our future, our most important resource, and the private sector simply CANNOT afford to NOT pay attention. We must take our responsibilities to these kids seriously, as seriously as we do our fiduciary duties in business.

Private sector involvement in public education is simultaneously altruistic and self-interested. Through public/private partnerships, we in the business sector can do much to enhance the health and spirit of our communities as well as bolster the long term

prospects of our own bottom lines. If we are Bill Gates, we can do a staggering thing, like donating over \$50 million to start up 67 new, small high schools in New York City.

But even if our pockets are not as deep as Mr. Gates's, we can donate books, supplies and equipment; we can encourage volunteerism from our employees and peers to support the efforts of teachers and other school professionals who are stretched beyond imagination; we can provide college scholarships; internships; and ultimately, employment. But perhaps most importantly, we can provide these kids with inspiration, with hopes, with dreams. I'm stating the obvious here, but this last point is particularly crucial for kids from socio-economically disadvantaged communities and kids with broken or damaged home lives, who might otherwise never be exposed to the magnificent concept of their own unique, unlimited potential.

This may all sound rather idealistic, perhaps even naïve. But you wouldn't be public servants if you didn't suffer from a little idealism yourself. And the truth is that private sector involvement has worked and will continue to work, by infusing countless hours and millions of dollars into the public school system. And it is all done because we in the business community believe in the unlimited potential of a WELL-EDUCATED new generation.

Ah... but here's the rub. What does being "well-educated" actually mean? In the current lexicon, it seems to be increasingly defined as being good at taking high stakes, standardized tests like the Regents Exams. From my perspective, this trend is not just ill-advised, but a virtual hijacking of the educational system and a betrayal of the very students the system purports to serve. These exams demoralize our kids, waste teachers, time, calcify the curriculum, and only serve to beget further and excessive testing, since kids cannot possibly be expected to face the Regents Exams without having mastered the technique of taking these kinds of exams in the first place.

I know that today you have heard from experts in the field, who can pick apart the specific technical issues with the Regents Tests : how they are statistically flawed, racially biased, educationally unsound. And I know you have heard personal stories from educators, current students, and graduates about how these exams negatively affect their lives in the classroom and beyond. But I am here to testify about the negative impact of these tests and the classroom environment these tests spawn in the real world: the business world and in our society as a whole.

In my twenty years of professional life, I have hired and managed countless employees. And, not to be too immodest, but I have a reputation for consistent, good hiring. And I have NEVER, not ONCE, hired someone based on their scores on a high stakes test, nor based on what I perceive to be the negative attributes and qualities that are nurtured by a system that focuses on those types of tests.

- I am not interested in people who have memorized, regurgitated, and then duly forgotten facts. I am interested in people who are resourceful and curious, and know how to find new and relevant information and know how to analyze that information.

- I am not interested in people who are trained to tell me what I already know or what can be easily looked up on the Internet; I am interested in people who view the world in fresh, new ways; who are creative and imaginative.
- I am not interested in people who have been drilled to the point of dullness; I am interested in people who are spirited, inspired, and inspiring.
- I am not interested in people who look at the world in black and white terms, who think there are right answers and wrong answers; I am interested in people who know what questions to ask, who understand the world is complex, nuanced, and ever-evolving.
- I am not interested in people who were treated like widgets in an assembly line; I am interested in individuality, uniqueness, and diversity.
- I am not interested in "yes men" (or , "yes women"); I am interested in minds that challenge conventional wisdom.

The people I hire are smart, integrated human beings; they have IQ and EQ (Emotional Intelligence); they are critical thinkers; they are conceptual thinkers; they have had experiential, hands-on learning; they are creative, analytical, collaborative, curious, adaptable, inventive, effective, and responsible

In short, they are the kinds of people who are nurtured by a system in which educational achievement is evaluated not by standardized tests, but via MULTIPLE ASSESSMENT tools: tools like graduation and drop-out rates, attendance records, percentages of kids who go on to and remain in college; tools like multi-disciplinary portfolio assessments and teacher evaluations.

As Principal for a Day, I have spent time with several of the New York Performance Standards Consortium Schools, alternative high schools which do not use the Regents Exams, but instead utilize a variety of innovative Multiple Assessment tools. Schools like Urban Academy and Satellite Academy in Manhattan; Fanny Lou Hamer High School in the infamous Fort Apache section of the South Bronx. It would take me the rest of the morning to describe to you the inspirational, personalized, and deeply effective education that goes on within those walls. These are some of the most devoted and skilled teachers and principals you can imagine, working with a very challenging population. The results are outstanding, well-documented, and award-winning. I have taken these kids out on field trips, I have helped them with their homework, I've provided a mentorship and given them career advice; I have gone with them to their community externships and I have listened to their dreams. These are amazing kids who benefit from a very special educational alternative. Please do not take that away from them.

There are many kids ^ some of the most creative, inquisitive and promising in our society who simply CANNOT survive in a system of mandatory, standardized testing. I know because I was one of those kids. I can't tell you how many times I ended up vomiting in

the nurse's office or cutting class just to avoid a test. If I hadn't been able to transfer to an alternative high school in my public school system - an alternative high school which did not subject me to standardized tests - I simply would have withered. My D average never would have changed. I wouldn't have grown up and attended the University of California at Berkeley and graduated cum laude. I wouldn't have gone on to business school at a top tier University and received my MBA with honors. I wouldn't have had my successful career. I wouldn't be giving back to society.

Everyone has heard the exhortation to "think OUTSIDE the box." It has become the mantra of contemporary business. It implies that "thinking INSIDE the box" is a bad thing, a limiting thing, a behavior that does not further the corporate mission or grow our society. And thinking INSIDE the box is precisely what mandatory, standardized tests like the Regents Exams are teaching our kids. This trend is a major threat that undermines our entire public educational system and the very future of this generation of students. The system needs reform, and needs it now.

You Senators on the education committee are facing a Herculean task and I do not envy you. There is tremendous political pressure to demonstrate that New York's public school students are meeting "standards" but by continuing to travel down the tired, old road of standardized tests, we have effectively bankrupted our entire public education system. Multiple Assessments, which for years have proven to be the key to the phenomenal achievements of the New York Performance Standards Consortium Schools, are the most effective means to meet the necessity for standards and still serve the evolving needs of individual kids in an ever-changing and dynamic world. Multiple Assessments are the only way we can create a lasting culture of excellence in our public school system.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Manne
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