

**Alliance for Quality Education:  
Agenda for School Improvement  
Prepare *all* Students for College and/or Careers  
with *New Standards*  
AND an *Enriched Curriculum***

The New York State constitution requires that every student in New York receive a sound basic education. NYS's highest court defined sound basic education as "the basic literacy, calculating, and verbal skills necessary to enable children to eventually function productively as civic participants capable of voting and serving on a jury."<sup>1</sup> By today's standards, functioning productively as civic participants also means being able to pursue a college education and/or a career. But we have not delivered on that promise to our children. In hundreds of schools across New York, especially low income/high needs schools, students do not have access to classes that adequately prepare them for post-secondary educational or vocational programs. In addition, the current focus on standardized assessments has stripped many schools of the ability to develop other important skills in students—skills like problem solving, research, interpretation and reasoning that are so important to a quality life beyond secondary school.

Without resources and supports, New York's new standards will just be a set-up for failure for too many schools and students. What does it take to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> century education to all students, and to ensure their success?

New York State needs a plan to address the gap between the high needs and wealthy schools.

Congress and the Federal government have encouraged states to adopt "Common Core Standards," which have been developed by a task force established by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. These standards will establish what *all* students should be expected to learn—and to be taught—through their elementary and secondary years to prepare them for success in college and careers.

New York State adopted the new Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2010. After a period for public comment and revisions, the standards are expected to be implemented in the state's school districts in September, 2011. In 2013 and 2014, the state will adopt and implement new standards in the sciences, economics, social studies, computer technology and other subjects.

Standards are the specific skills or areas of knowledge that students are expected to learn through each year of their elementary and secondary educational experience. But standards are just the destination. Once standards are set, a state must develop the road to get there—the curriculum—and the mile posts to make sure students are on track—assessments. A curriculum provides the specific content, and the step-by-step components of learning that link each year into an aligned program. A district or state curriculum determines what is taught in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, for example, and how skills learned in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are built upon in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and on up the levels. Assessments are aligned with both the curriculum and the standards, and are intended to ensure that students are on pace throughout their school experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. Pataki, 86 NY2d at 316, 2006

In order to fully implement the new Common Core standards in New York, new curricula and assessments will be developed to mirror them. The proof of our state’s commitment to new standards will be in their implementation—not just whether teachers understand the new standards and curriculum, but whether they have the classroom supports, instructional skills and supports to deliver them to all students.

## **New York State Must Have a Plan to Ensure that *All Students* Can Reach New Standards for Success in College or Careers**

The commitment to prepare all students for college or careers takes more than just setting common standards and training teachers to deliver a curriculum. It requires:

- (1) *every* school to be provided with the basic *resources* necessary (science labs and materials, technology, up-to-date textbooks, etc.) to adequately teach to these standards;
- (2) students to have access to high-quality and comprehensive *supports* to give them the best possible chance to *succeed* in these college and career tracks;
- (3) teachers to have the *ongoing* professional development needed to create lesson plans that not only are aligned with the curriculum, but also develop the problem solving and analytical skills that students need to be successful in college and careers. The state must prepare teachers to work effectively with all their students—from the most gifted to those who are struggling—so that *all* students can be realistically expected to meet the new standard

### **Achieving the goal**

There have been successful efforts to provide low-income students with access to high-level “college/career-ready” experiences in high school. In each case, students are supported with resources and assistance. Some of these on-the-ground experiences suggest the ingredients for success:

#### **A school culture that focuses on college and career—even in the early years:**

- From elementary school up through high school, schools need to focus on college and career, and not just “high school graduation,” as most of our high schools do now;
- Schools need to start early to help students envision themselves in college. Middle schools should sponsor college visits so that students have exposure to colleges and career programs;
- By 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students and parents need to understand the requirements for college or career program admissions, and what it takes to apply to post-secondary programs;
- At every level, schools need the technical resources required—science labs or kits, technology and more—to deliver rigorous academic programs.

#### **Supports for teachers to ensure that they have the skills to deliver college/career-level instruction to all students:**

- Teachers need to be supported and trained to differentiate instruction so that the state’s high expectations are translated into reality in the classroom;
- Class sizes must accommodate the need for differentiated instruction to ensure all students are getting the attention they need;

- Beyond the training necessary to deliver the new curriculum, teachers must be trained and given the time to develop lesson plans that promote the critical thinking and creativity that are also critical to success in college.<sup>2</sup>
- Professional development needs to reinforce and instill in teachers the need for high standards for all students;
- Schools must be given adequate resources so that teachers can concentrate on delivering a rigorous curriculum without wondering how to “make do” with inadequate materials;
- Teachers should be encouraged to share successful and innovative lesson plans with each other, so that there is cross-cultivation of successful instruction throughout a school and a district.

**Strong alignment between schools—from elementary through college level:**

- Grade level curricula must be “back-mapped” from local colleges to the high school, and then down through middle school and even elementary school, so that there is alignment of coursework and expectations at every level;
- Feeder schools within a district—elementary, middle and high schools—need to be in regular communication to ensure that they are in alignment with each other in multiple ways, not just on curricula, but also in areas of student discipline expectations, parent engagement and others.
- Schools need to build relationships with local colleges as well as local career training programs, so that teachers are working with professors, and there is clarity around the skills and educational content that students will need after they graduate.

**Access to supports and ongoing motivation for students:**

- Schools need to have ongoing tracking mechanisms in place to catch the early warning signs that students may not be on track to graduate ready for college or career—and to alert parents and students when remediation may be necessary;
- Freshman transition academies help prepare students for high school, and catch students who may need remedial support before they get to high school;
- Students may need access to computers, and quiet places to study. School libraries, local agencies and community-based organization should be recruited to provide monitored study spaces for students in the afternoon, evenings and on weekends;
- Access to peer and trained tutors and one-on-one help;
- Districts should offer ample opportunities for students to take college classes for credit, while they are still in high school;
- Students and their families need to be supported with hands-on activities to prepare them for the process of filling out college and career applications and financial aid requests, and conducting interviews. Schools should sponsor group visits to nearby colleges, and many more activities to help students understand and feel comfortable with the process.

**Engagement and support for parents:**

- Parents, too, need to convey a message to their children that there is an expectation of “life after high school.” Schools need “parent liaisons” that work to develop programs with and for parents to engage them in the cultural shift at the school;
- Schools also need systems to communicate with parents when their students are falling off track for graduation, and ways that parents can help get their child back on track.

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<sup>22</sup> Educational Policy Improvement Center. 2009. “Project Rationale,” College-readiness Performance Assessment System (C-PAS). Eugene, OR: EPIC. Online at [www.epiconline.org/cpas/project\\_rationale](http://www.epiconline.org/cpas/project_rationale)

The process of transforming schools to create the availability, the expectation and the supports necessary for a meaningful college and career preparatory education is a complicated one that requires real investment by all stakeholders. Teachers and parents need to be on board and engaged in the process. And there need to be structures that allow for adjustments and reflection along the way, so that things that aren't working can be addressed and changed. Without a thoughtful, comprehensive implementation, it's possible that these Common Core Standards will just set our students up to fail, and further deepen New York State's education deficit. What is New York's Plan?

## **Research and Resources:**

"Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance 2009-4006. Available at: [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher\\_ed\\_pg\\_091509.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher_ed_pg_091509.pdf)

*"College Success for All – How the Hidalgo Independent School District is Adopting Early College as a District-wide Strategy."* By Jobs for the Future, October 2010. Available at:

<http://www.jff.org/publications/education/college-success-all-how-hidalgo-independ/1144>

This report tells the inspiring story of the Hidalgo Independent School District in Texas, and how an entire district has been retro-fitted to prepare all students for college and careers. All 7 schools in the district have aligned their curricula with each other, and with a set of local colleges and vocational programs. The success rate for the district's students—who are 99.5% Hispanic and 89% economically disadvantaged, has been impressive. The effort has been heavily funded with outside philanthropic dollars, however.

*"Saved by an Education—A Successful Model for Dramatically Increasing High School Graduation Rates in Low-Income Neighborhoods."* Center for Community Change, May 2001.

Supported by funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (now HHS), the Center for Community Change embarked on a project to provide every high school student then living in DC's public housing projects, with the kinds of wrap-around and enrichment supports that middle-class students take for granted. The results were impressive, with 85% of students graduating from high school over four years.