



TELLING THE TRUTH

A NYCAN POLICY PRIMER



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THE URGENT NEED FOR A GENUINE TEACHER
EVALUATION SYSTEM IN NEW YORK STATE

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Executive Summary

At the same time that New York public schools are failing thousands of our students in their preparation for college or careers, we bestow the vast majority of our teachers with positive job evaluations.

In 2010, the legislature passed a historic law calling for the overhaul of teacher evaluation systems across New York State. That law required school districts and teachers unions to collaborate on the creation of meaningful evaluations, which included clear measures of student learning. Nearly two years later, implementation of these evaluations remains stalled. Governor Andrew Cuomo’s recent proposal that school districts and unions meet this obligation in order to receive additional state aid for public schools is a much-needed inducement to realize this vision.

Denying reality will not cut it anymore. We need to start telling the truth to our teachers, our school leaders and ourselves about teacher performance. If we are not able to implement an effective teacher evaluation system this year, we face the loss of nearly 1.7 billion dollars in federal aid and state aid combined. In our six largest cities alone, we face the loss of \$756,416,778 in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years.

This report reveals for the first time the cost to the state’s largest school districts if they fail to implement teacher evaluations. The below table shows the amount of state and federal aid combined that the six largest school districts stand to lose in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years:

Money at risk for the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years

(federal and state aid combined)

Albany	\$	4,569,871
Buffalo	\$	50,941,392
New York City	\$	592,219,997
Rochester	\$	48,495,756
Syracuse	\$	43,814,456
Yonkers	\$	16,375,306
TOTAL	\$	756,416,778

Just as important as the money is the ability to make sure that an effective public school teacher is teaching all of our children. This primer provides background on the teacher evaluation system in New York:

- **The Problem:** Dismal student achievement results.
- **The Money:** A review of the money at stake.
- **The Law:** What the state’s teacher evaluation law requires.
- **The Solution:** A framework for creating an effective evaluation system and incentivizing school districts to finally adopt it.

The Problem

The New York State Assessment results from 2011 illustrate that huge swaths of New York children are not meeting our own state standards for basic proficiency in school.¹

On average, only 24 percent of students in eighth grade in the “big five” cities in New York (New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers) achieved proficiency in English language arts. Only 29 percent of eighth-graders achieved proficiency in mathematics. Low-income students from cities, towns and suburbs across the state posted similarly dismal results. Only 32 percent of low-income eighth-graders achieved proficiency on the English language arts test. Only 47 percent of low-income New York eighth-graders did so in mathematics.

Similarly, national data reveals astonishingly low numbers of students meeting proficiency benchmarks. The 2011 results on the national assessment known as the Nation’s Report Card, or more formally as the National Assessment for Educational Progress, reveal that only 35 percent of eighth-grade students in New York achieved proficiency in reading.² Only 30 percent of eighth-grade students reached the proficiency benchmark in math.³ When the data is disaggregated by race, the results are even worse. A shockingly low 13 percent of black New York eighth-graders and 13 percent of Hispanic eighth-graders achieved proficiency on the 2011 Nation’s Report Card math exam.

Yet in the face of the enormous challenge we face as a state to overcome these dismal results, we continue to tell most New York teachers that their performance is satisfactory.

¹ <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/press/Release/20110808/home.html>

² <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2011/2012454NY8.pdf>

³ <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2011/2012451NY8.pdf>

The Money

The inability of local school districts and their unions to agree upon a comprehensive, student-centered teacher evaluation system could deprive communities across the state of much needed funds for public schools.

Race to the Top

On August 24, the U.S. Department of Education awarded New York State with nearly \$700 million (\$696,646,000) as a winner in the second round of the federal *Race to the Top* competition. As a competitive grant program,

New York was one of only 11 states to receive a share of the \$4.35 billion pot of money from the federal government. Those funds were given to the state on the condition that certain promises made in New York’s application would be met. The section in the *Race to the Top* report titled “Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance” maps out the following promises New York made in its application:

- All districts implement the new performance evaluation systems.
- Teachers and principals that are rated developing and/or ineffective are provided appropriate support to improve their practice.
- Teachers and principals who are deemed to be adding value to student growth receive supplemental compensation.
- Ineffective teachers and principals are removed from service in an expedited manner.⁴

⁴ New York *Race to the Top* Application (2010)

These goals are contingent upon the implementation of evaluation systems across the state and on the inclusion of reliable and honest indicators that use student achievement as a predominant factor.

School Improvement Grants

New York State received \$395 million in school improvement grant funding over the last three years from the federal government through section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, formerly known as No Child Left Behind. These grants provide adequate resources in order to help raise student achievement in the lowest-performing schools.

Teacher Incentive Funds

New York State receives \$40 million and New York City an additional \$46 million in federal funds to attract and retain principals and teachers with a performance-based compensation system at high-need schools.

State aid

Local school districts could be denied their share of the planned four percent increase in education spending if they can not come to an agreement with their local bargaining unit about the teacher evaluation system.

TABLE 1 Money at risk for the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years (federal and state aid combined)

5 "Race to the Top Subgrants to Participating LEAs" (2010), available at: <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/allocations/>
6 "School Improvement Grants," available at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/nclb/programs/titleia/sig1003g/>
7 "School Aid Runs" (the State Education Department), available at: http://publications.budget.ny.gov/eBudget1213/1213_eBudgetPublications.html?panel=6

CITY	RACE TO THE TOP ⁵	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS ⁶	TEACHER INCENTIVE FUND	PROPOSED STATE AID INCREASES ⁷	TOTAL
Albany	\$1,274,469	\$3,295,402	\$0	\$0	\$4,569,871
Buffalo	\$9,495,726	\$9,279,358	\$0	\$32,166,308	\$50,941,392
New York City	\$256,130,115	\$57,969,882	\$55,000,000	\$223,120,000	\$592,219,997
Rochester	\$8,180,818	\$12,334,938	\$15,200,000	\$12,780,000	\$48,495,756
Syracuse	\$3,914,456	\$11,500,000	\$12,600,000	\$15,800,000	\$43,814,456
Yonkers	\$3,255,306	\$3,500,000	\$0	\$9,620,000	\$16,375,306
Total					\$756,416,778

If we include allocated School Improvement Grants from the 2011–2012 school year through the 2013–2014 school year, the total loss to these districts could amount to more than \$9 million, or \$929,605,330.

Albany's proposed aid increase is \$0 because it is receiving less building aid than it did in 2011–2012.

The Law

In May 2010, Governor David Paterson and the state legislature passed a historic law calling for the overhaul of teacher and principal evaluation systems across New York State. Chapter 103 of the Laws of 2010 requires that school districts throughout the state evaluate teachers and principals based on an “annual professional performance review.”

Under the new law, local school districts and their teachers union must adhere to the following:

- Twenty percent of a teacher evaluation must be based on student learning growth derived from the state assessment or other comparable measures. This number will increase to 25 percent upon implementation of a value-added growth model in 2012–2013.
- Twenty percent of a teacher evaluation must be based on locally selected measures of student achievement that are determined to be rigorous and comparable across classrooms as defined by the state’s education commissioner. This amount will decrease to 15 percent upon implementation of a value-added growth model in 2012–2013.
- The remaining 60 percent of the evaluation will be based on other measures of teacher and principal effectiveness consistent with standards prescribed by the state’s education commissioner in regulation. These measures could include classroom observations, parent and student feedback, lesson planning, and their positive contribution to the school community.⁸
- All components except those attached directly to student growth and other comparable measures are subject to collective bargaining.
- The result of these evaluations are required to “inform” all major employment decisions, such as the awarding of tenure and compensation.

New York’s proposed teacher evaluation system is consistent with the latest research. According to interim results released by the Measures of Effective Teaching Project, the combination of classroom observations, student feedback and student achievement can help predict a teacher’s impact on future student outcomes and provide important feedback for a teacher to improve.⁹

But despite these findings, the new law and New York’s promise in its award-winning *Race to the Top* application to develop and imple-

⁸ New York Regents (2010)

⁹ “Gathering Feedback for Teaching: Combining High-Quality Observations with Student Surveys and Achievement Gains, Measures of Effective Teaching” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012)

ment such a system, the school districts and the teachers union have not come to an agreement on which “locally selected” measures of student achievement should be included, delaying its implementation.¹⁰

10 A recent court decision stated that the two 20 percent student achievement sections of a teacher evaluation can not be entirely comprised of a state assessment used in one particular way.

The Solution

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Teachers impact student learning enormously. Students whose teachers help them achieve at high levels, as indicated by their standardized test scores, are more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries and save more for retirement.¹¹

One of the best ways to identify and support effective teaching is through a teacher evaluation framework that identifies great teaching through multiple measures. Historically, evaluation systems carried little meaning. Nearly 99 percent of teachers receive a satisfactory rating in a two-tiered rating system, even in the lowest-performing schools.

11 Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman and Jonah E. Rockoff, “The Long-Term Impacts of Teachers: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood” (2012)

Multiple tiers in teacher rating systems are crucial. Comprehensive evaluation systems with multiple ratings keep all teachers from being treated as essentially the same, what The New Teacher Project termed the “widget effect.” One study of 12 districts across four states showed that nearly three out of four teachers come out of their evaluation process with no specific feedback or plan to help them improve, including novice teachers, who may be most in need of such help as they begin their careers.¹² As U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan recognized in 2010, “our system of teacher evaluation... frustrates teachers who feel that their good work goes unrecognized and ignores other teachers who would benefit from additional support.”¹³

12 Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect* (The New Teacher Project, 2009)

A multi-tiered rating system by itself is not enough. Even in teacher evaluation systems with multiple rating categories, more than 70 percent receive the highest rating and 24 percent receive the second highest.¹⁴ These inflated scores are the reason why including student achievement data in teacher evaluations is essential to assessing and supporting teachers.

13 The New Teacher Project (2010)

What’s more, even when school districts and individual schools collect useful evaluation information, they often use it too narrowly, focusing primarily on remediation and dismissal. Managers then miss an opportunity to leverage their best teachers and to help teachers with potential to grow.

14 Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern and Keeling (2009)

New York's teacher evaluation systems must be both comprehensive and honest. A teacher evaluation system that fails to incorporate student achievement data as 40 percent of the evaluation will fail to provide the clear and comprehensive feedback necessary to identify and support good teaching. A comprehensive evaluation system that exists on the books but isn't implemented won't work either. School districts and teachers unions must quickly resolve all outstanding issues preventing them from adopting comprehensive evaluation systems.

Governor Cuomo's proposal to withhold state aid increases from districts that do not adopt comprehensive evaluations systems rightfully ensures real consequences for school districts and unions that fail to meet their obligations to our students. State leaders should continue to use every tool at their disposal to hold stakeholders accountable and insist upon full implementation of the new evaluations systems for the 2012–2013 school year.

About NYCAN

NYCAN: The New York Campaign for Achievement Now launched in January 2012 as an education reform advocacy organization building a movement of New Yorkers with the political will to enact smart public policies so that every New York child has access to a great public school. We are a branch of 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now, a growing national network of state-based education reform advocacy groups with campaigns in Rhode Island, Minnesota, Maryland and New York based on the groundbreaking model developed by ConnCAN in Connecticut. NYCAN is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization funded by individual donors and foundations.

NYCAN is led by Founding Executive Director Christina Grant. A native New Yorker, Christina is a graduate of Hofstra University, the Teacher's College at Columbia University and Fordham University. In 2003, Christina became a New York City Teach For America corps member and went on to become a teacher at a KIPP school in the Bronx. Before joining NYCAN, Christina worked as managing director of new site development at Teach For America. She was previously the deputy director for the Office of Charter Schools at the New York City Department of Education.

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