



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

The Coming Year

SED recently released the 2018 3-8 ELA and math results. Because the 2018 tests were administered over two days instead of three days as used to be done, SED does not believe it is fair to compare the 2018 results with prior year results. Despite an unwillingness to compare test scores, SED willingly highlighted the decrease in opt-out rates over the past few years. The 2018 opt-out rate was 18 percent, down from 19 percent the year before

and 21 percent the year before that.

The reduced opt-out rate prompted The Education Trust-New York (an affiliate of The Education Trust led by former commissioner and secretary of education, John King) to issue a statement wherein it stated that it was time to stop giving “disproportionate political sway” to parents who opt-out their children and focus on historically undeserved children. Regardless of whether one accepts the characteriza-

tion of “disproportionate political sway,” The Education Trust-NY statement highlights a source of tension surrounding the state assessments. The opt-outs are seen as a largely suburban act of civil disobedience in response to the use of state assessments, whereas The Education Trust-NY, a self-described advocate for students of color and those living in poverty, believes the assessments being utilized (among other measures) in teacher evaluations will help ensure that students of color and/or poverty will be taught by an effective teacher.

This tension surrounding use of the federally mandated 3-8 ELA and math tests may come to a head in 2019. At the end of the 2018 legislative session a bill passed the assembly that would have de-linked the 3-8 assess-

ments from teacher and principal evaluations and made the identification of the assessments used to establish a growth score negotiable. While certain regents supported this bill, SED opposed it. Despite the same bill having 55 sponsors in the Senate, Majority Leader Flanagan proposed a different bill, one that made the entirety of teacher and principal evaluations negotiable. However that bill also included a significant expansion of available charters, a poison pill that the assembly democrats would not swallow. As a consequence, nothing happened.

The fact that nothing happened caused SED to go back to its earlier stated intention to revise the APPR, ideally before the self-imposed moratorium on the use of test scores in evaluations expires

at the end of the 18-19 school year. Given the opposition of SED to the above-referenced assembly bill, I think it is reasonable to assume SED will construct an evaluation system that will still use the state assessments in teacher and principal evaluations, but we don't know how or to what extent.

If the democrats take back the state senate, the bigger question might be whether the efforts of SED relative to the teacher and principal evaluation system will matter at all. From its very origins in 2010, the APPR system has been as much a political issue as an educational one. ■

Consequences of Narrowing the Curriculum

Sponsor Opinion Piece by Dr. Bruce H. Crowder, Senior Researcher, Educational Vistas, Inc.

With only a third of our students reading at a proficient level for the past twenty years based on the sampling of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, it is certainly time to examine what barriers are contributing to this critical area of learning. Also, NYS reading results are not that dissimilar.

A recent NAEP review of the problem identifies a deep devotion to basic reading skills in the first several years of elementary school with the elimination of diminution of subjects such as history, science, and the arts. This is not to say that basic

reading skills are not essential with the aim of students reading on level by grade three. However, it is most unlikely that students will acquire knowledge in other subject areas on their own while keeping in mind that state and national assessments use passages from history, science, and the arts.

Federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and its replacement, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) requires states to administer annual reading tests to student in grades three through eight and once in high school. Attached to the legislation are con-

sequences if schools fail to boost reading scores. When these scores do not rise after third grade, there is a disinclination to bring history and science into the reading arena.

In addition, there is a tendency to treat reading comprehension as a set of skills which it is not. It depends primarily on what readers already know. Without a common content, test designers provide students with passages on a variety of topics that most often have nothing to do with what they are learning in school. Students practice skills and strategies to “find a main idea” or “draw an inference,” rather than working with a text's content.

It's the curriculum . . . ! The only way to improve students' reading comprehension is an expanded curriculum with an

emphasis on knowledge and key vocabulary by teaching history, science, literature, and the arts. Curricula will have to be revised, particularly at the elementary school level, to boost content learning and all that it does to expand a student's thinking and experience.

References

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1998 to 2018.

Dr. Bruce H. Crowder is a senior researcher for Educational Vistas, Inc. His work is primarily focused on creating pathways for deeper learning for all students through a dynamic curriculum replete with strategic performances. Dr. Crowder may be reached at bcrowder@edvistas.com. ■

The statements and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily imply or reflect the opinion or philosophy of the School Administrators Association of New York State.

*“I dream my painting and I paint my dream.”
-Vincent van Gogh*



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