

Colleagues, we are living through a time of unrelenting change driven by political and economic agendas. It is inappropriately referred to as education reform. There are three possible outcomes of externally mandated school change—our schools can become worse, they can stay the same, or they can improve. Improvement would qualify as reform. However, I do not think improvement is the likely outcome when the culture and values of the corporate world are foisted upon public education. Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, Eli Broad....it is as if they fashion themselves to be missionaries who kindly impose salvation on the ignorant natives of foreign culture. Mr. Gates' recent essay in the Wall Street Journal was titled... "MY plan to fix the world's biggest problems" The wise men must be mounting their camels to follow the star that leads to Seattle....

And for those who seek to profit from the turmoil caused by chaotic change, public education is the new real estate bubble. It is the way of capitalism to always seek new markets. In the words of Mr. Murdoch-- "*Public education is a \$500 billion market waiting desperately to be transformed*"

And so each of us has a choice to make for our students and for our profession. We can stand up and speak out against ill conceived change, or we can cower, hunker down and allow our profession and our public schools to slowly be dismantled.

I guess that brings us to the principals' letter against APPR and how it came to be.

When my LI colleagues and I first heard that the NY State Education Department was seriously considering evaluating teachers by test scores, we did not really believe that it would happen. We thought the idea was ludicrous--we thought it was political pandering-- and that somehow reason would prevail. We were wrong. When we saw the final plan, and realized that we were to rate teachers with numbers in order to sort them into four categories, we were both indignant and outraged. Not only was this an assault on the professionalism of teaching, we knew that the negative consequences for our students and our schools would be enormous. Although we

understood that the intent of policymakers was school improvement, we knew that the opposite – school decline, was a far more likely outcome of APPR.

We were naïve enough, however, to believe that the opinion of the principals of some of the most successful schools in New York State –principals who led schools on every national list of success—would matter. We thought that someone in Albany might respect what we had to say. Silly us.....We didn't know that we were waiting desperately to be transformed.

Sean Feeney, the principal of The Wheatley School and the president of the Nassau County Principals Association and I decided that collective action was needed. Sean suggested that we draft a letter expressing our specific concerns. We called a meeting of Nassau's high school principals for the next morning. To our surprise, the room was packed. I will tell you that in the past if you put 25 Nassau County principals in a room, you would hear at least 35 different arguments on the same topic. Not this time. We were united. Our collective concerns about APPR united us and everyone was onboard about writing the letter.

Sean and I began drafting the letter, which turned into a short paper grounded in research. Linda Darling Hammond, Diane Ravitch and Kevin Welner of the National Education Policy Center reviewed and critiqued it. We incorporated suggestions from our colleagues and we revised the paper. In late October of 2011, our letter was sent to every Regent, the Commissioner and the Long Island legislative delegation. It had the signature of more than 600 Long Island principals. Today that letter has the signature of 1529 NY State principals and over 6000 teachers, other administrators and parents.

So what does that letter say....

Our first concern centers on the use of test scores in a teacher evaluation model. The research is clear-VAM scores do not produce stable ratings of teachers—different models yield different scores. How a teacher is rated changes, often dramatically, from class to class, from year to year and even from test to test.

The volatility of the scores is only one problem. This year's NYS growth scores had considerable bias as well. Although the state's methodology is supposed to give every teacher a fair shot regardless of the students they teach, that was not the case. Teachers whose students had higher test scores to begin with, were advantaged by the model. Principals whose students had higher initial test scores were even **more** advantaged by the model. High numbers of free or reduced priced lunch students-- disadvantaged teachers and produced lower teacher scores. When confronted with the evidence of bias, Commissioner John King speculated that perhaps this *"is telling you something descriptive about where talent is placed"*.

It couldn't be a flaw in the model...it must be the talent of the principals and the teachers.

It couldn't be the effects of underfunded or overcrowded schools....it must be the talent of the principals and the teachers.

It couldn't be a lack of accounting for peer effects, that operate at both the classroom and the school level, effects that are well established in educational research....it must be the talent of the principals and the teachers.

It certainly couldn't be problems with the test itself.....everyone knows that pineapples don't have sleeves.

Which brings us to the second concern contained in the principals' letter, which is the consequences for students of using test scores to evaluate teachers.

If the purpose of evaluation is to improve the instruction that our most at risk students receive, APPR may very well have the opposite effect. We know, that the bias in the model makes it difficult for teachers of such students to get a good score. In addition, because now they might lose their jobs under APPR, teachers and principals may hesitate to take a position serving low scoring students in high poverty schools. By the way, don't let anyone tell you that student scores are only a small part of the model. If a teacher is rated ineffective in the two categories of

student achievement, they are rated ineffective overall—even if their principal gives them a perfect score. That is the way APPR is designed.

When we principals suggested that teachers might worry if they were assigned high risk students, some folks feigned outrage and shock. What were we suggesting?

I don't know if you have been following the new outcomes based plan for doctors who work in public hospitals. The story was in the NY Times about a week ago. Essentially the proposed model is that doctors who serve the poor in public hospitals will have their compensation based on patient outcomes and their patients' opinion of service.

Here is what one doctor, Dr. Himmelstein of Harvard University's medical school said about England's implementation of a similar system... “when primary-care doctors in England were offered bonuses based on quality measures, they met virtually all of them in the first year, suggesting either that quality improved or — the more likely explanation, in his view — “they learned very quickly to teach to the test.” Sound familiar?

“I think the most interesting finding is, things that were not measured, in a few studies, appeared to have gotten a bit worse,” Dr. Himmelstein said. “For instance, patients were not as likely to stick with the same doctor, possibly because they were encouraged to see whichever doctor was available — speed was one quality measure — rather than the doctor who might know them best.”

Dr. Himmelstein also said doctors might try to avoid the sickest and poorest patients, who tend to have the worst outcomes and to be the least satisfied. In a letter to the editor following the piece, Bruce Leff, professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins medical school warned that the proposed pay for performance scheme would give doctors an incentive to avoid the homeless and the severely disabled. Here is the bottom line. No matter how noble the profession, human behavior is affected by incentives.

And as surely as incentives affect the behavior of doctors, they will affect teacher and principal behavior. That is the premise of the entire APPR system--what gets measured gets done. Test scores are in it because our policymakers are obsessed with getting test scores up.

The curriculum will narrow to what is tested, and teachers will teach to the test. A friend of mine was furious last week when his son brought home a multiple choice vocabulary quiz from his 2nd grade music class, which asked students to identify the definition of the word 'commissioned'. It is a safe bet to assume that the music teacher is going to be evaluated using the school's ELA score. If you want to kill the love of music in a seven year old, that is the way to do it.

No doubt we will see test scores inch up a bit, at least at first. But the price that our students will pay from test prep and less enrichment will affect them for years to come. I was interested to read that four-year high school graduation rates are at an all time high. That is because, at least in part, under NCLB, high schools are punished for low four-year graduation rates. We have an incentive to push kids out in four years--ELL students who could really use a fifth year of high school, students with disabilities who would benefit from extra schooling, students who are truant who are pushed into credit recovery schemes...these are the consequences of an emphasis on four year graduation rates. Politicians then pat themselves on the back and declare victory. What gets measured gets done.

The third concern we had was the waste of tax dollars at a time of great fiscal constraint and a tax cap. A recent article reported that for the Syracuse School district the cost of APPR implementation is between 10 and 12 million dollars—all out the district budget. And that does not include the cost of testing, which nationally costs our taxpayers billions. If all of that fortune were used to reduce class size, hire support personnel, hire instructional coaches, open high quality pre-schools, reduce racially isolated schooling, and help teachers develop thoughtful assessments that allowed students to demonstrate what they know, rather than to try to catch them in what they don't know, how much better our schools would be. It may be true that what gets measured gets done, but in the good school, the child-centered school, what is nurtured grows.

And so principals asked that APPR be piloted, that we have freedom in the way we incorporate student learning and that teachers not be ranked by numbers. Massachusetts created a Race to the Top approved evaluation system that has a far lower test score impact, does not assign a number to any teacher, and is being carefully phased in over the course of years. The response by Governor Cuomo to our concerns, however, was to tie state aid increases into APPR implementation.

The final chapter on APPR has not been written, and I assure you, we will live in interesting times. We will not give up and we must fight on. Your group, which is committed to performance standards not tests, is way ahead of the curve. But we are catching up. Parents are becoming increasingly alarmed by all of the testing. The Niagara Regional PTA has taken a courageous stand against testing and evaluating teachers by student scores. They will introduce a resolution at this year's State PTA convention and I predict that it will be endorsed by nearly every region and by the full convention. We are circulating an online petition that asks for a moratorium on high stakes testing and it has, in less than one month, it garnered more than 9000 signatures.

There is hope, but when billionaires invest and help fashion policy, it is not easy. As an educator, you must be willing to educate your parents and help them take action and speak out. You must be willing to distribute online petitions, write letters to your local newspapers and to your legislators. You need to let parents know that their children deserve more than day after day of testing and test prep. And you must organize teachers to let Albany know what we already know—the rank and file teacher is NOT in favor of APPR—teachers do not want to be labeled with a number and they do not want to be evaluated by student scores.

Every day that is filled with the wrong change instead of true reform, is a day when our students lose. Every dollar that is wasted on misguided policies and multiple choice testing is a day our students lose. And when teachers live in fear, feel discouraged and are overwhelmed by change in which they do not believe, our students lose. These misguided policies, masquerading as reform, damage the relationship between the teacher and her students that is at the heart of good

instruction. Take courageous stands. Make a difference. And thank you for your service to the students of New York City.