

Chancellor Joel I. Klein Announces

New Accountability System for NYC Schools

a Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association luncheon on June 7, 2005, Chancellor Joel I. Klein announced a new accountability system for New York City schools that will provide a comprehensive picture of how well each school is educating students. The new system will use a sophisticated analysis of annual standardized test scores to compare school results. Known as a “value-added” system, this system will track the performance of individual students over time and judge schools based on how much academic growth each student makes from year to year.

Chancellor Klein’s announcement comes at a time when school systems around the country are struggling to meet increased accountability requirements under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Under NCLB, school systems must set Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for every school to ensure that every student is meeting standards by the 2013-2014 school year. The current accountability system in NYC tracks YP for every school, but how one school can meet its AYP targets while another cannot remains a mystery in terms of data analysis.

The Chancellor’s new accountability system is designed to solve this mystery by: 1) identifying how well a school is meeting its YP targets; 2) identifying how well a school is increasing individual student performance from year to year; and 3) correlating this data to what is going on in the school. The school system planning to present the data in a new School Performance Report Card that will consist of three main elements:

Absolute Achievement – This portion of the report card will give the “bottom line” in terms of student performance, showing the percentage of students at each performance level (Level 1 - basic, Level 2 - basic proficient, Level 3 - proficient, Level 4 - advanced proficient).

Gains Analysis – This portion of the report card will show the progress (gains) that students are making from year to year (also known as the “value-added” measures).

3. Learning Environment Profile – This portion will present information on the school’s learning environment that directly affects student performance. These elements include: expectations for students, alignment between standards and curriculum, student work, use of school time and resources, professional development, staff retention, use of intervention strategies, overall approach to guidance and youth development, and parental involvement.

This new accountability system will make it possible to identify schools that under the Absolute Achievement measure may appear to be low performing schools but are actually effectively improving student performance. For example, if a school has a large English language learner (ELL) population, it is likely that the Absolute Achievement scores will include a larger percentage of students performing below proficiency on English Language Arts tests than a school without a large ELL population. At first glance, the school could appear to be a low-performing school. However, through the Gains Analysis, it is possible to see how well the school is improving student performance over time—from grade 1 to grade 2 to grade 3, etc. If the school is helping its students improve their English language skills faster than a comparable school, then it can be deemed an effective school because it is achieving its mission of improving educational outcomes.

Furthermore, it will be possible to identify what such a school is doing differently from its peers, such as professional development for ELL teachers, parent participation, and after school programs. These practices can be shared with other schools and educators to help them become more effective as well. For schools that are not improving educational outcomes, Chancellor Klein anticipates the data will provide an “early warning” system.

A pilot of the system will begin next year, and it is scheduled for system-wide adoption in 2006. For more information, visit www.nycboe.net.

Students Achieve Record-High Scores!

New York City school students achieved record high one-year gains on city and state tests. Below is a snapshot of the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level on the main city and state tests:

2005 City English Language Arts test for grades 3, 5, 6, and 7

Increase of 14.4 percentage points from 40.4% to 54.8%

2005 City Math test for grades 3, 5, 6, and 7

Increase of 7.5 percentage points from 42.5% to 50%

2005 State English Language Arts test for grades 4

Increase of 9.9 percentage points from 49.6% to 59.5%

These increases in student performance come three years into Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel I. Klein's "Children First" initiative aimed at dramatically reforming the New York City public school system in order to improve student achievement. Mayor Bloomberg describes the student performance on these tests as a testament to the strength of the reforms, calling the last three years "a new era of hope for our city's public schools" (*The New York Times*, June 2, 2005). Chancellor Klein sees a direct correlation between the reform initiatives under Children First and the outcomes on this year's tests: "Our new Citywide core curriculum, coaches, professional development, interim assessments, and aggressive intervention programs for struggling students, coupled with the enormously hard work of our teachers and other school staff, all contributed to these tremendous gains." (NYC DOE Press Release, June 1, 2005). Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg also noted that 8th graders did not perform as strongly on the city and state tests, and they plan to focus on improving these outcomes in the coming year. To the right is a summary of three key reforms and the outcomes that Bloomberg and Klein credit as resulting from the reforms (see "Are Chancellor Klein's Reforms Working?").

Use Test Data to Help Your Child Improve Performance

After the school year's testing cycles are complete, parents receive a Parent Report from the New York City Department of Education that explains how their child did on the year's tests. The Parent Report provides the following information:

Performance Level – The performance level is listed as Level 1 (basic), Level 2 (basic proficient), Level 3 (proficient) and Level 4 (advanced proficient).

Scale Score – Performance levels are based on a range of scale scores. Your child's scale score indicates where he or she is within a performance level and how much help he or she needs to move up to the next performance level.

Performance on Each Standard Area – New York State has standards for each learning area, and students are measured for their performance in meeting each of these standards. The Parent Report includes a section that shows how well your child is meeting each standard compared to the average score for all New York City students.

Advice to Parents on Helping their Child – The Parent Report includes a description of one topic or standard area and an activity that parents can do with their child at home to help him or her meet the standard. The NYC DOE provides descriptions of activities for all standard areas on the website www.growparents.com. The report also provides tips for helping students work with their children over the summer.

When you receive your Parent Report, you should review it closely with your child, discussing the elements that he or she excelled in and those in which he or she needs additional support. Then, make an appointment to discuss the report with your child's teacher so that you and your child can make an informed action plan for academic improvement. This may include accessing school-based resources such as Saturday Academies, summer programs and Supplemental Education Services (provided by federal law to students attending chronically low-performing schools). The plan may also include accessing community resources such as tutoring and enrichment programs at community-based organizations, libraries or museums. The action plan should be engaging, and it should excite you and your child. It should *not* be a punitive plan that discourages learning and inquiry.

Are Chancellor Klein's Reforms Working?

Below are descriptions of three reforms that Chancellor Klein launched as part of his Children First initiative, as well as student outcomes that he can credit as resulting from these reforms.

Reform Initiative	Student Outcomes
<p>Ending social promotion for third and fifth graders and providing additional support to teachers, parents and students to help at-risk students make rapid gains in performance. Promotion is based in part upon the performance level that a student achieves on standardized tests. The levels are: Level 1 (basic), Level 2 (basic proficient), Level 3 (proficient) and Level 4 (advanced proficient). Students must score at Level 2 or higher to meet promotion criteria under the no social promotion policy. (Mayor Bloomberg recently extended this policy to 7th graders as well.)</p>	<p>√ Students held back in the third grade as a result of the new promotion policy improved their City ELA and math performances this year: 71.1% of these students met the Level 2 promotion criteria in ELA (compared to only 11.5% last year) and 78.3% met the Level 2 promotion criteria in math this year (compared to 20.5% last year).</p> <p>√ The number of 3rd grade students achieving at Level 1 on one or both of the City tests fell by 2.5 percentage points.</p> <p>√ The overall number of fourth graders meeting or exceeding grade level on the State ELA test increased to 59.5%. This is nearly a 10 percentage point increase over the prior year and it is the highest percentage since testing began in 1999.</p> <p>√ Over 90% of the at-risk fifth graders who attended 11 to 20 sessions of the Saturday Academy programs designed to help them improve their academic performance met the Level 2 promotion criteria in City ELA and more than 72% met the Level 2 promotion criteria in City math. Nearly 94% of the fifth graders who attended 21 or more Saturday Academy sessions met the Level 2 promotion criteria in City ELA and approximately 79% met the promotion criteria in City math.</p>
<p>Closing the achievement gap in which Black and Hispanic students, as a group, achieve lower student outcomes than Asian and Caucasian students.</p>	<p>√ On the State ELA test, the percentage of Hispanic fourth graders meeting or exceeding grade level increased 11.5 percentage points and Black fourth graders achieved a 9.7 percentage point gain. The gains represent the highest one-year improvement ever for Black and Hispanic fourth graders.</p> <p>√ On City ELA tests, Black students achieved a 14.4 percentage point gain and Hispanic students achieved a 15.1 percentage point gain. Together, Black and Hispanic students improved at a faster rate than Asian and White students, thus narrowing the achievement gap.</p> <p>√ On City Math tests, Black and Hispanic students achieved their highest performance ever and highest gains ever (Black students gained 7.3 percentage points and Hispanic students gained 7.4 percentage points).</p>
<p>Decreasing bureaucracy and increasing educational support by restructuring the school system into a set of 10 regions with a set of local instructional superintendents helping principals implement agendas.</p>	<p>√ All of the City's 10 regions achieved gains on the State 4th grade ELA exam. Fourth graders in the lowest-performing regions (where less than half of all students met standards in 2004) achieved the highest one-year gains.</p>

Parent Resources

For more on how to help your child improve his or her academic performance visit the following websites:

www.growparents.com

A parent's guide to the math and ELA tests.

www.nycenet.edu/parents/

NYC Department of Education's guide for parents.

www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml

US Department of Education's guide for parents that provides detailed information on parent rights under the No Child Left Behind Act.

www.pta.org

The National Parent Teachers Association website.

www.insideschools.org

Created by Advocates for Children, this website provides a comprehensive, independent guide to the NYC public schools as well as tips for parents on helping their children succeed in public schools.

www.greatschools.net

This site includes a "parent center" that provides helpful tips on how the school system works, how to choose a school, where to look for help and at-home learning projects.

www.aft.org/parents/index.htm

The national teachers' union's parent-help page.

www.parentsmart.com

Articles on how parents can help their children succeed in school.

www.readingrockets.com

This site provides information and activities to help teach kids to read.

www.schoolratings.com/bestbooks.htm

This site explains the various reading awards and provides reading lists for students.

www.ed.gov/americanreads

The US Department of Education provides a reading list from the America Reads program.

www.scholastic.com/families

Scholastic provides a parent's guide to encouraging children to read.

www.figurethis.org

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics provides math challenges for the entire family.

www.mathforum.org/dr.math/

This site provides an archive of math problems for students at all levels. It includes detailed explanations of how to solve the problems.

Children who read every day retain more of the information they gain during the school day. Thousands of books are free to borrow from your local library. Each branch of the Brooklyn, Queens Borough and New York Public Libraries offers a reading program for students of all ages, and librarians are eager to help families find books.



To find the library closest to you, call:

Manhattan 212-621-0626

The Bronx 718-579-4200

Brooklyn 718-230-2100

Queens 718-990-0700

Staten Island 718-442-8562



From the desk of:

Sy Fliegel, CEI-PEA President

In today's world of public education, there is a lot of talk about “accountability.” Too often, accountability systems sound like complex strategies to “pass the buck.” Chancellor Joel I. Klein’s recent announcement of a comprehensive accountability system that identifies specific aspects of each student and school’s performance is a system in which the Chancellor will be able to say, “the buck stops here.”

The kinds of data the new system will collect—and the ways that his team plans to use the data to improve student and school performance—could genuinely increase accountability in public education. He is planning to dig deep into test data to find out what makes some schools more or less successful than others. And here is the part where the idea of “accountability” really takes hold: He plans to use this data not to wag a finger at low-performing schools but to help schools and students improve.

What is impressive to me is that the Chancellor could have rested on his laurels after one of the most successful testing years in recent New York City history. He could have easily pointed to the record-high student outcomes and claimed them as proof that everything that he and Mayor Michael Bloomberg have done over the past three years is working. Instead, he celebrated the results and began laying the groundwork to help students and schools produce even higher results.

The educational debate over the value of “high stakes testing” will no doubt continue. The new accountability plan recognizes the importance of value added (gains analysis) and more significantly the value of a learning environment profile that looks beyond test results. Since test results have a major impact on the lives of individual children (including promotion and admission to higher education) it is our responsibility to ensure that our children have the academic skills they need to succeed.

I applaud Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg for being truly accountable for the performance of our city’s public school children. We should all support their new accountability system and learn to use it as a tool to help improve in-school and at-home learning.

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The Center for Educational Innovation - Public Education Association (CEI-PEA) is a New York-based nonprofit organization that creates successful public schools and educational programs. Our staff of experienced leaders in public education provides hands-on support to improve the skills of teachers and school leaders, increase parent involvement, and channel cultural and academic enrichment programs into the schools. The benefits of this hands-on support are multiplied through a network of more than 170 public schools. We operate in cooperation with, but independently of, the public school system, providing private citizens the opportunity to make wise investments in the public schools. For more information about CEI-PEA, please call (212) 302-8800 or visit us on the web at www.cei-pea.org.

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