

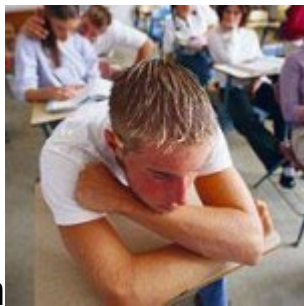


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Ineffective Practices at NYC DOE



The Problem

The New York City Department of Education manages the flagship public school system of the United States, serving a population of 1.1 million students in 1,800 schools. Educational policies established by the NYC DOE have a high likelihood of influencing the initiatives implemented in other districts across the nation, as evidenced by the development of programs similar to the NYC Teaching Fellows in high-needs urban areas across the country. As in other large, urban school districts, a significant number of New York City's students either fail to graduate or complete school without the skills or abilities necessary to achieve a successful future. As a response to this system-wide dilemma, the NYC DOE has enacted many accountability measures to review overall school quality, the performance of principals and the performance of students at the school. Unfortunately, these assessments have failed to support students with academic struggles, as evidenced by the lackluster graduation rate of 66% that was reported by the City of New York for the 2012-2013 academic year.[1]

To better promote student success, it is imperative that the public demands reforms that will modify the ineffective practices that currently exist in the NYC DOE. The current system is designed as a one-size-fits-all model, with all students following the same academic path despite their individual needs, interests, or skills. While this model could prepare students for successful entrances into the city university system (CUNY), it does not. New York City's students leave high schools without being appropriately prepared for CUNY entrance examinations, and as a result, are often required to take remedial classes in their first year of college. Though there have been mergers between DOE public schools and community based organizations (CBOs) to address the issues that plague struggling learners, these partnerships have not yet maximized their positive impact on student performance because schools and CBOs have drastically different standards that make it difficult to develop mutual performance goals. The DOE's ineffectiveness stems from its rigid educational model, which fails to create individualized educational options for students, inadequately prepares students for life after high school, and prevents efficient collaboration with non-profit community based organizations.

POLICY OPTIONS

The DOE's Ineffective One-Size-Fits-All Model

The current educational system in New York City does not offer pathways for students who wish to pursue their own versions of success, which may include goals different from college attendance. The skills necessary to obtain a diploma in New York do not prepare students for all possible opportunities that will enable them to thrive in society, as the Regents examinations are not crafted for students who might aspire to work in technical trades or service industries. For students who do not plan to go to college or pursue professional careers, the current educational system is a tedious hindrance that only increases their likelihood of losing confidence in themselves, despising the pressures imposed on them by modern society, and becoming what any individual would classify as being unsuccessful by today's societal standards.

Educational theorists state that developing an individualized learning plan has multiple benefits for a student, as it provides them with a better opportunity to meet high academic expectations.[2] Students and parents should be given the opportunity to establish reasonable learning goals, and students should be placed on an educational path that will help them fulfill their own personal missions. **One potential solution** is to create a larger variety of courses, but also incorporate more writing, speaking, arithmetic, and financial management skills into the daily instruction that already occurs. **A second potential solution** is that the DOE designs multiple new curriculums, with each focusing on a particular academic or career path that students can select based on their academic abilities and personal preferences.

DOE's Ineffective Preparation of Students for Life After High School

Currently, the graduation rate for students graduating with their 4-year cohort is 65%, up from 47% in 2005. Most graduates attend CUNY, making up 70% of its freshmen population. These numbers may be misleading or confusing because although more students are graduating, many must take remedial coursework upon their enrollment, significantly decreasing their likelihood of finishing college. It is critical to acknowledge that in addition to costing students time and money, remedial coursework does not grant students' college credits. As a result, students who must take remedial classes start their college careers at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers. A study states that at CUNY "...just over half of incoming freshmen in fall 2006 got a bachelor's degree within six years at senior colleges. At the community colleges, just 16 percent of students entering in 2009 earned a two-year associate's degree within three years."^[3] One of the goals of the DOE is to push college and career readiness, but students are leaving high schools underprepared if only 29% of graduates have high enough test scores to avoid remedial courses in the city university system.

Ideally, the DOE and CUNY should collaborate on developing new assessments of student learning. **One solution** is to shift from a standardized test focused curriculum to a portfolio based assessment tool. Rather than taking Regents or placement exams, students would complete Common Core aligned projects to prove their college readiness. **A second solution** is to create a specific College and Career curriculum with a minimum credit requirement. This would build students' awareness and understanding of what life after high school looks like during their freshman year of high school. This option will allow the DOE to hold schools accountable for specific college/career skills, and ensures that all students receive the same information.

Inefficient Collaboration between the DOE and Partnership Organizations

The performance measures of non-profit organizations do not often align with those of schools they partner with, which is typically due to funding. For example, in 2011, New York City was awarded roughly \$60,000 to distribute the Education Partner Organizations through School Improvement Grants that focused on turning around schools across the city with performance measures focused on student attendance and staff turnover rates.^[4] The same EPOs that received SIG funding could simultaneously receive funding from a foundation to run programs to combat summer learning loss based on a different set of criteria. The challenge is that neither set of outcomes are aligned with the principal performance review which as of 2013-2014, focuses largely on student achievement, improvement and school culture.^[5] This type of goal misalignment makes it difficult for principals and leaders of nonprofits to work together effectively.

One solution to this problem is to require all non-profits that receive funding from the Department of Education or another government agency to align their goals with the district or a specific school. Nonprofit organizations that cannot align their goals with the Department of Education without compromising their program model do not need to compete for government funding but can seek money from private foundations and still work in and with schools. This policy gives organizations the ability to be autonomous, true to their mission, vision and program but adds a layer of accountability to ensure that money coming from the government is utilized effectively to increase graduation rates and the quality of education that New York City students receive to prepare them for a more productive future.

[1] City of New York, Office of the Mayor, "The Graduation Rate Increased To An All Time High", Dec 4, 2013, accessed Mar 19, 2014, <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/387-13/mayor-bloomberg-chancellor-walcott-new-york-city-students-achieved-all-time-record/#/0>

[2] Goodwin, M., and Forsyth, H.A. (2000) A Development of Professional Studies by Negotiated Work-Based Learning. In: *The Impact of Work Based Learning: proceedings of a conference, Cambridge, 14/15 December 2000*. Cambridge: Work Based Learning Network of the Universities Association for Continuing Education.

[3] New York City Department of Education. *NYC Graduation Rate Class of 2012 (Cohort 2008)*. 2012. Microsoft Power point <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/31DFBEE6-2620-4792-BE7A-01B00F2E5B56/0/2012GraduationRatesPUBLICFINALWebsite.pdf>

[4] New York State Education Department, News, Sept 7, 2011, accessed Feb 28, 2014, <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/SIG.NYC.60M.html>

[5] New York City Department of Education, Field Guide for 2013-2014 Principal Performance Review, accessed Feb 1, 2014, <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/9E8BDA3B-3D19-43F8-B4CC-FC305D4B1C20/0/PPRFieldGuideCFarina.pdf>

COMMENTS

Christopher Donaldson
May 10, 2023 at 1:14 pm

The problem with the NYCDOE is the security clearance process after being nominated when receiving an official offer. The Office of Personnel Investigation requires a security clearance investigation before starting a job with children in a DOE school. For three consecutive years, I have been denied three times, even though I never worked in the DOE in any capacity. The last time I was cleared was back in 2018 when I was doing student teaching for a graduate-level program prior to certification. The reason for my denial is that my work experiences have been controversial. OPI does not care that these experiences are learning experiences and not

disappointments. They want to perceive me as a threat, and I am not that kind of person. OPI believes in perfection and in life, no one, no job, and no school is perfect because of subjectivity and capriciousness on their side and they do not care about due process and equal protection. The Constitution grants citizens these rights as a law-abiding citizen, as long as my rights and freedoms are not taken away and are within the law.

DEBORAH ADEKUNLE-ODELEYE

September 5, 2022 at 9:24 pm

This is a well researched article on a dire issue affecting New York City. CUNY incoming students having to take remedial classes because they have not achieved proficiency required for college level classes. This is bad because it shows we are not maximizing the potential of our high school students. While I agree with the author that some students are not good at taking test because they have special needs, have anxiety or bad test takers. Therefore their test scores don't reflect their ability hence taking remedial classes is redundant. I also agree that these students will be better served with a portfolio that better represent their ability. However it will be a terrible rationalization to conclude that is the main source of why most student are not ready of higher learning. A more robust way of addressing this issue is by having a more income integrated public school system. Where disadvantaged kids are not clustered in schools which increases the amount of resources to bring this student up to par.

[Reply ↓](#)



DION GUY

September 4, 2022 at 6:24 pm

As an educator, I am a believer that every student have an affinity with learning, once they find out what they love to learn. I agree that the current system is a one size fits all model. However, what age should we use individualize plans? When do we shift from foundational skills to individual interest? In my experience, the real issue is literacy rates. Low literacy has a direct correlation with mortality, income, and incarceration.

[Reply ↓](#)



Rafael Santana

May 23, 2022 at 11:12 pm

Very informative article. As a product of the public school system, I can agree with the many flaws that are associated with DOE and how easily students can get lost within the system and basically left to fend for themselves. In a city like NYC, this shouldn't be something that we should be dealing with however its a sad reality.

I believe that the DOE and CUNY collaboration would be really beneficial to what is currently in place. Having articulations agreements to create new assessments of learning will be extremely beneficial. It would increase student success rates within the DOE as a whole while potentially increasing admissions within CUNY. Given that NYC serves roughly about 1.1M students, that would be a huge uptick in students within the 26 campuses in CUNY.

Additionally, creating more college success courses geared to teach students life after high school will only enhance the learning experience. Majority of the skills needed after HS are not taught within

the DOE, so these courses would play a crucial role in making sure those that are graduating will be ready for the future.

Overall, this is an ongoing problem that has yet to be corrected by the city and with some of these alternatives, it would improve the system.

[Reply ↓](#)



Maggie

February 15, 2022 at 5:46 pm

This article is very interesting and directly relates to a focus group regarding restorative justice that I recently joined at the high school I work at. We are a DOE school and we are looking to revamp our advisory and school curriculum to address the gap between high school graduation rates vs. staying in college rates. Our high school has very high acceptance rates (around 80%) but it drops to 50% for if the students actually attend, and then drops even lower if they actually stay on and graduate college.

We have been looking at ways to revamp curriculum and address the holes in the current way we teach subjects, and specifically target how we judge if students are college-ready. Our advisory courses teach college prep and skill-building, as well as talking about the other options available to student outside of school. Students in this generation are learning different than past generations, and the education system must also evolve as we gather more data on the subject. Establishing an alumni network to make sure these students feel that they are still connected to their high school post-graduation is also a part of our initiative.

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Ben Engel

February 15, 2022 at 11:59 am

I really like the idea of a portfolio being an option for graduating seniors.

This article raises a lot of good points about the inadequacies of the modern education system. To me it always comes back to the fallacy of post modern capitalism that we all live in. School really exists as a repository for youth to be someplace while the adults work. Any student questioning this system of studying for the test is met with a lack of other options. There should be no limits to learning and if we listened to students more we could probably learn a lot about new curriculum design.

Very interesting read and good work!

[Reply ↓](#)



ABIGAIL WALCZAK

February 14, 2022 at 11:48 pm

I really appreciated the amount of stats in this argument. I also agree that moving curriculum from standardized testing to Core college readiness goals more effectively prepares students for graduation and higher education.

I think there are many opportunities to expand on the above research topic.

[Reply ↓](#)



Paul Manfredi

November 26, 2021 at 10:35 pm

An excellent project that highlights several severe issues within the DOE. Another significant problem about the DOE is that the chancellor is constantly changing, and the policies change with them.

[Reply ↓](#)



RACHAEL JENISON

September 14, 2021 at 1:27 pm

I enjoyed reading your strong analysis and well thought out solutions for how the DOE can better serve its students, particularly those who are struggling academically. Students and parents establishing learning goals to fit individual ambitions resonated (I was a tutor for a long time and sitting down and talking through goals was often how we started), as did creating new metrics for student learning. I would like to know more about standardizing performance goals between the DOE and CBOs – I wonder if it would also be effective to contract with CBOs that specialized in working with students who are struggling academically or who have learning styles that would be served by different types of instruction.

[Reply ↓](#)



Evan T

September 14, 2021 at 8:01 am

This project was well done. I hope to discuss a similar problem and I already am getting useful ideas for potential solutions. Luckily, I have seen some of these policy suggestions begin to be adopted, albeit on a small scale and in special circumstances. Students attending DOE international high schools for English language learners, for example, are exempted from the Regents and complete a portfolio assessment instead. This practice seems to be effective (although at this stage I have only anecdotal evidence), and makes me wonder if small-scale pilot programs within the DOE could be a key to innovation.

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Sophia Savory

September 2, 2021 at 11:06 am

The article provided a well defined analysis of the problem and detailed supporting arguments with statistical data regarding graduation rates in comparable institutions to CUNY. The use of policy options presented thoughtful approaches to stimulate conversations and engage in the democratic process. However, there is information presented in the final section which alludes to a disconnect between the DOE and Partnership organizations at arriving at consensus. The article encompasses the difficulty organizations face in addressing policy issues in decision making, as it is difficult to gain the 'buy-in' from all involved in these decision-making processes. It is hoped that the stakeholders in the decision making processes will engage in deliberation to arrive at the best solutions for the students enrolled at CUNY.

[Reply ↓](#)



Will Andreycak

September 1, 2021 at 4:24 pm

Fascinating read on an important topic. To give NYC schools and the DOE a bit of credit, the graduation rate for the 2016 cohort (students who entered high school in 2016 and which is the most recent reporting cohort) had a 78.8% graduation rate. This is significantly higher than the figure from 2012-2013—although I imagine this post was written several years ago. In any event, I agree that the school system should be more adaptive and that graduation rates don't necessarily mean preparedness for college. I'd be also interested to learn how systemic factors such as poverty, segregation, etc. impact school efficacy and how recent interventions (e.g., community schools, Universal pre-k, Charter schools, etc.) have or have not improved school quality.

[Reply ↓](#)



Alejandra Rodas Perez

August 31, 2021 at 11:01 am

This was informative and organized. It was easy to follow along and the student did an excellent job of explaining the problems and solution. By providing concrete details and information on the current state of DOE, it was easier to transition into an effective solution.