



Mayor of Providence

Angel Taveras

May 22, 2013

The Honorable Eva-Marie Mancuso  
Chair  
Rhode Island Board of Education  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Eva-Marie Mancuso and Members of the Rhode Island Board of Education,

I am writing today to express my deep commitment to improving student achievement in Providence and to working with professional educators, parents and young people in our city to ensure that all of our students are prepared to succeed after they graduate from our public school system.

I believe that appropriate testing is a helpful measurement tool across ages and disciplines. Standardized testing is a tool that is used to evaluate students and professionals at all levels - from early childhood screenings, to the bar exam, to training for police officers and firefighters. We are working diligently in Providence to prepare our students for success in the future and to do well on the standardized tests that they are required to take. Our district-wide graduation campaign is evidence of that.

That said, I remain concerned about the use of the NECAP test as an assessment of graduation readiness and in turn as a determining factor for our state's high school graduation requirement.

Unlike tests designed for measuring student achievement, such as the Regents exams in New York, the NECAP test was not designed to say whether students achieved mastery of a body of knowledge. It is an indispensable tool for assessing how well students – and their schools – are doing comparatively, but it is my understanding that when the NECAP test was identified as the standardized measurement of choice in Rhode Island it was not intended by the education policy makers at the time to be a make-or-break state graduation requirement.

I worry that state leaders have imposed a graduation requirement on our students that is tied to a questionable measurement of individual proficiency and graduation readiness. Particularly knowing that by 2014-2015 a new test - the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) - will be in use in Rhode Island to assess individual performance in important subjects.

It seems our collective attention should be focused on implementing the new curricula and assessments that the new Common Core standards will require - so that our educators, parents and students have the adequate time to prepare and adjust their teaching and learning strategies. This slightly altered approach would also decrease the burden placed on our professional educators - who are tasked with and will be held accountable for - improving student achievement on the NECAP, on the PARCC which will soon be in use, and on improving overall graduation rates.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Angel Taveras

Mayor

CC: The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee  
Commissioner Deborah A. Gist  
The Honorable Antonio Barajas, M.D.  
The Honorable Michael Bernstein  
The Honorable Colleen A. Callahan  
The Honorable Karin Forbes  
The Honorable Jo Eva Gaines  
The Honorable Michael A. Grande  
The Honorable Patrick A. Guida, Esq.  
The Honorable William Maaia  
The Honorable Lawrence Purtill  
The Honorable Mathies Santos  
Superintendent Susan Lusi  
Keith Oliveira