

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's New NY Education Reform Commission

There are serious issues facing our system of public education. New York State spends more money per student than any other state in the nation, but ranks 39th in high school graduation rates. Only 73 percent of New York's students graduate from high school and only 37 percent are college ready.

Future generations of students cannot compete in the global economy unless we dramatically reform our education system. The New NY Education Reform Commission ("Commission") will be tasked with exploring ways to best prepare all New York's students to be college and career ready and prepare students to become active citizens.

Mission of the New NY Education Reform Commission

The Commission will examine the current structure of the state's education system through the lens of what is in the best interest of students. The Commission shall comprehensively review and assess New York State's education system, including its structure, operation and processes, with the goal of uncovering successful models and strategies and developing long-term efficiencies that will create significant savings while improving student achievement and providing students a high-quality education. The Commission will explore best practices and models from other states and nations that could be implemented in New York.

Specifically, the Commission will explore ways to improve:

- Teacher recruitment and performance, including the teacher evaluation system;
- Student achievement;
- Education funding, distribution and costs;
- Parent and family engagement;
- The problem of high need districts/low wealth school communities; and,
- Best use of technology in the classroom.

Further, the Commission will look at New York's education system to examine if our current structure of school districts meets the needs of our students while also respecting the taxpayer.

Objective 1

Find ways to improve teacher recruitment and performance, including the teacher evaluation system

The quality of a student's teacher is one of the most important factors in his or her success. In order to improve student achievement we must ensure that every student has an excellent teacher. Although historic, the state's new teacher and principal evaluation system still faces challenges, including ensuring that the evaluation system is implemented effectively in each of the state's 700 school districts.

The Commission will examine factors contributing to teacher recruitment and performance, including:

- Incentives to hire and retain our best teachers to keep them in New York;
- Improvements in the teacher evaluation system to ensure New York is implementing one of the best evaluation systems in the country;
- The use of teacher evaluations for decisions regarding promotion, hiring and termination as required in the teacher evaluation law; and,
- Teacher preparation, certification and education programs to ensure that teachers are properly trained to best educate our students.

Objective 2

Improve student achievement

New York ranks 39th in high school graduation rates and many of those students who graduate are not college- or career- ready, with many requiring remediation. The Commission will examine factors in raising student achievement from prekindergarten through high school in order to ensure that all students are on track to graduate high school and be college/career ready. The Commission will examine:

- Current state accountability and curriculum requirements to determine if the system sufficiently prepares students;
- Model programs to improve student achievement beginning in early learning programs and continuing throughout high school;
- Plans to ensure that every student is achieving at grade level, including intervention and support systems; and,
- Policies to improve student attendance and retention.

Objective 3

Examine education funding, distribution and costs

New York spends more per pupil on its education system than any other state. The financing of our education system is dictated by diverse local needs. However, spending is often focused on administrative overhead and benefits rather than the classroom.

The Commission will examine factors that impact spending in education, including:

- School funding and distribution of state aid, including the current school aid formula;
- Efficiency and utilization of education spending at the district level;
- The percentage of per-pupil funding that goes to the classroom as compared to administrative overhead and benefits;
- Approaches to improving special education programs and outcomes while also reducing costs;
- Identifying ways to reduce transportation costs, including in rural areas, while still providing needed services to students;
- Identifying successful strategies and ways to create significant savings and long-term efficiencies, while maintaining the integrity of educational services; and,
- Analysis of district-by-district returns on educational investment and educational productivity to identify districts that have higher student outcomes per dollar spent, and those that do not.

Objective 4

Increase parent and family engagement in education

Parents and families need to be fully engaged in preparing our children for success in school and thereafter. The Commission will examine state and local policies to increase parent and family engagement, including:

- How the school calendar meets the needs of students and families to optimize engagement, including parent-teacher conferences and half-days;
- District and school-level policies to address student attendance issues;
- Access to information regarding teacher effectiveness; and,

- Parental involvement in school policies, including placement of students in low-performing schools and the classrooms of ineffective teachers.

Objective 5

Examine the problem of high-need and low-wealth school communities

The students in our high-need school districts (i.e. low-wealth school districts) — both urban and rural — have needs that must be examined and fully addressed. Often, these students go to school with needs that are not being addressed in the school system, at home, or in their communities. Such needs create obstacles to achieving educational excellence.

The Commission will examine the ways to better serve students in high-need urban and rural communities, including:

- Identifying the unique challenges for students in high-need urban and rural school districts, and how those problems create obstacles to academic success;
- Comparing best practices and services that will meet the needs of our high-risk students; and
- Prioritizing spending in high-need school districts in order to address problems that may require additional or different services and adequately prepare high-risk students in urban and rural schools.

Objective 6

Find the best use of technology in the classroom

The use of technology in the classroom is critical for the educational success of our students. First, technology is a central part of young people's lives and students are expected to be proficient in its use in order to be successful in our increasingly global economy. Second, our students in the most isolated geographic regions of the state cannot access the same educational programs as students in wealthier regions and technology can help bridge that gap.

The Commission will identify the best use of technology in the classroom, including:

- Access to high quality educational programs through technology in large geographic districts with small populations;
- Cost barriers to providing high quality educational programs that can be delivered through the use of technology in the classroom; and
- Requirements and demands of the job market in an increasingly global economy, including science, technology, engineering and math.

Objective 7

Examine the structure of New York's education system to see if it meets the needs of our students while respecting the taxpayer

New York's education system is organized into 700 school districts, more than half of which educate fewer than 2,000 students. Each of the 700 school districts has its own administration and back office functions, which creates duplication and waste. The structure of this system creates inefficiencies in the way school districts deliver education. However, there are social and political obstacles to restructuring the system that must be addressed.

The Commission will examine the best model education systems, including:

- Whether the organization of the state's education system, with nearly 700 school districts, makes sense for the taxpayer and the education of our children;
- Ways in which we might reorganize the system to meet the needs of our students while respecting taxpayers, such as district consolidation and/or shared services;
- Comparing models from other states to achieve efficiencies and improved educational outcomes;
- Identify reforms and savings in special education that will contain costs through provider reforms while maintain quality service; and
- Examine ways to reduce costs and improve effectiveness, maximize informed participation in local elections, and facilitate shared services, consolidation and regional governance.

Composition of the Commission

The Commission will consist of no more than 25 members that will be appointed by the Governor. There will be a chair who will be appointed by the Governor.

Task of the Commission

The Commission will meet multiple times and will gather input and information from across the state. The Commission will submit preliminary recommendations to the Governor by December 1, 2012, or such other date as the Governor shall advise the Commission. The Commission shall make final recommendations to the Governor no later than September 1, 2013, at which time it shall terminate its work and be relieved of all responsibilities and duties, unless extended.

Staff to the Commission will include the Deputy Secretary for Education, the Assistant Secretary for Education and the Assistant Secretary for Higher Education to the governor.