





**TO:** P-12 Education Committee  
College and Career Readiness Working Group

**FROM:** John B. King, Jr. 

**SUBJECT:** Graduation Rates

**DATE:** May 9, 2011

**AUTHORIZATION(S):** 

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

Does the Board of Regents wish to report this year's graduation rates in a way that extends previous years' reporting practices by highlighting existing and new aspirational performance measures that are aligned with college- and career-readiness?

Proposed Handling

This question will come before the P-12 Education Committee and the College and Career Readiness Working Group for discussion at the May 2011 meeting.

Background

Over the past 10 years, the Department has increased the rigor of a high school diploma through changes to course, credit, and assessment performance standards. Beginning with students who first entered grade 9 in 2001, for example, graduates are required to earn 22 units of credit and obtain a score of 55 or 65 and above on five required Regents examinations (Comprehensive English, Global History & Geography, U.S. History & Government, Mathematics, and Science). In addition, the number of math and science credits required to earn a Regents diploma was increased. Although general education students were initially able to earn a local diploma with a score of 55 or above on these five required exams, the number of exams on which students must earn a 65 or above has gradually increased, beginning with the students who entered grade 9 in 2005, until the local diploma option is no longer available to general

education students who enter grade 9 in 2008<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation was introduced for students who completed additional credits and course sequences in a language other than English (LOTE), career and technical education (CTE), or the arts, as well as achieving a minimum score of 65 or greater on seven to nine Regents examinations, depending on the year in which they entered grade 9<sup>2</sup>.

### Aspirational Performance Measures that Align with College- and Career-Readiness

Recent evidence suggests that these diploma standards, although an increase in rigor over what they replaced, still do not prepare our students adequately for the demands of college and careers. There are at least three approaches to developing valid and rigorous aspirational performance standards that are aligned with college- and career-readiness. Each of these is grounded in the prior practices of the Board to use course and assessment requirements as a benchmark for judging the success of our teachers, principals, schools, and districts in preparing students to meet the challenges of P-12 and postsecondary success.

#### *Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation*

As described above, the Board has long supported the establishment of a differentiated diploma – the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation – that is based on distinct coursework and obtaining a score of 65 or above on additional Regents examinations<sup>3</sup>. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students in the 2002 through 2005 cohorts who earned each of three graduation credentials after four, five, or six years. Statewide, only 31.4% of the 2005 cohort earned a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation after four years. The percentage of students in a cohort who earned a local diploma after four years has decreased slowly from 11.8% for the 2002 cohort to 10.4% for the 2006 cohort. The biggest increase in students who earned a diploma after five or six years, however, is accounted for by the local diploma option.

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<sup>1</sup> The local diploma option remains for general education students who pass three Regents examinations with a score of 65 or above and two Regents examinations through an appeals process (see [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1005.html#regpasscore](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1005.html#regpassscore)). In addition, students with disabilities who first enter grade 9 in September 2005 or later and earn a Regents examination score between 55 and 64 continue to be eligible for a local diploma. Students with disabilities who first enter grade 9 no later than the 2010-11 school year, but fail any of the five required Regents examinations, may earn a local diploma by passing the corresponding Regents Competency Test (RCT).

<sup>2</sup> Students with disabilities who are exempt from the LOTE requirements, as indicated on the IEP, need not complete the LOTE, Arts, or CTE sequence requirements in order to earn the Advanced Designation Regents diploma, but must still earn the required 22 units of credit.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, a local school district may award a Regents Diploma with Honors or a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation with Honors to a student who achieves an average scaled score of 90 in all Regents examinations required for the diploma.

## *Graduates who Obtain Higher Scores on Regents Examinations*

At its February meeting, staff provided the Board with a performance measure aligned with college- and career-readiness that showed the percentage of students in the 2005 cohort who graduated from high school and earned a score of 80 or better on their highest math Regents examination and 75 or better on their English Regents examination. The Department selected this measure because:

- Although research<sup>4</sup> indicates that college-readiness is comprised of more than prior academic performance alone, there is a clear consensus among admission directors in New York State's two- and four-year colleges that students who are well prepared to enter college without the need for remediation score at least 75 on the English Regents examination and 80 on a Regents mathematics examination<sup>5</sup>.
- These scores were used to help determine the new cut scores for proficiency on the New York State Testing Program grades 3-8 English language arts and mathematics assessments.

Figure 2 displays these two aspirational performance measures in comparison to the statewide graduation rate. Although 71.8% of the 2005 cohort graduated after four years, only 37.3% of the students in the 2005 cohort met all course and exam requirements to graduate after four years **and** scored at this increased level of rigor on their English and math Regents examinations (referred to as the "ELA/Math Aspirational Performance Measure"). The figure displays an additional comparison to the percentage of students in the cohort who graduated with a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation (31.4%).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Conley, D. T. (2010). *College and Career Ready: Helping all Students Succeed Beyond High School*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>5</sup> Research conducted by Howard Everson and the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment noted that achieving these scores correlated to a significantly reduced likelihood of having to take a college remediation course. Conversations with admissions directors of two- and four-year public and private colleges in the Western New York, Central New York, Hudson River, and New York City regions indicate that: to the extent that Regents examinations are considered, a score of 75 to 85 on these exams is often viewed by selective schools (as part of their holistic review of applicants) to be the lower threshold for admissions; SUNY's central office indicated a general view that 85 is a mark of solid competence, whereas below 75 is a mark of "inadequate preparation"; 75 on Regents is a threshold for placement in remediation for CUNY; and 75 on Regents roughly correlates to a 500 on the SAT, another threshold for remediation. At the conclusion of the 2011-12 school year, the Department will have data from SUNY and CUNY that will allow us to evaluate college- and career-ready standards as a predictor of whether a student is required to enroll in a college remediation program. At the conclusion of the 2012-13 school year, we will be able to evaluate career- and college-ready standards as a predictor of grades earned in key college courses (e.g., freshman English).

### *Additional Course and Achievement Differentiation for Mathematics*

There have been concerns from the field that using the highest performance on any single math test is not a sufficiently sensitive measure of college- and career-readiness. Rather, students who are best prepared for post-secondary challenges may be those graduates who score at 75 or greater in Math A or Integrated Algebra **and** pursued advanced-level math, even with a lower level of achievement (e.g., scoring at 65 or greater in Math B, Geometry, or Algebra2/Trigonometry). It should be noted, however, that since fewer students pursue advanced math in high school, any aspirational performance measure that uses this standard will be significantly lower (as a percentage of the cohort) than those calculated with other approaches outlined above. In order to address this concern from the field, however, the Board may wish in the future to develop this additional performance measure.

### Student Graduation Requirements

Over the past year, the Regents, Department staff, school/district personnel, and the public have considered possible revisions to student graduation requirements. These options – including increased course and/or assessment requirements in math, other changes in Regents examination requirements, offering flexibility to earn credits through career and technical education courses, etc. – would need to be phased in over time. In addition, these new graduation requirements will become even more aligned with standards for postsecondary success as the Department's secondary-level assessment program, including its Regents examinations and the tests created through the Race to the Top assessment consortium, is modified or designed for the purpose of indicating college- and career-readiness.

### Aspirational Goals for Schools and Districts

Although the revision of college- and career-ready student graduation requirements is dependent on a multi-year phase-in schedule, the Board may wish to set aspirational performance measure targets for schools and districts now based on current research and knowledge. Indeed, the Board adopted in December 2009 an aspirational five-year graduation rate goal of 95 percent to be included in the School Report Card beginning with the 2009-10 school year. This action was an acknowledgement that we can and should influence outcomes by setting challenging goals for schools and districts.

Previous goals that focused on assessment performance at scores of 65 or higher and entry-level math courses may need to be replaced with new goals that focus on higher levels of achievement and the pursuit of advanced math. With these new goals in place, the adoption of the college- and career-aligned Common Core State Standards in English and math, as well as the Regents reforms in curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development, our students will be well supported and prepared for their postsecondary challenges.

## Recommendation

The Department is scheduled in May to release the graduation rate for students who entered grade 9 in the 2006-07 school year. It is recommended that this release make clear the percentage of students in the cohort by school and district who are prepared for postsecondary success according to the aspirational performance measures listed below while the Board continues to pursue its plan for the multi-year phase-in of more rigorous student graduation requirements.

*Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation aspirational performance measure:*

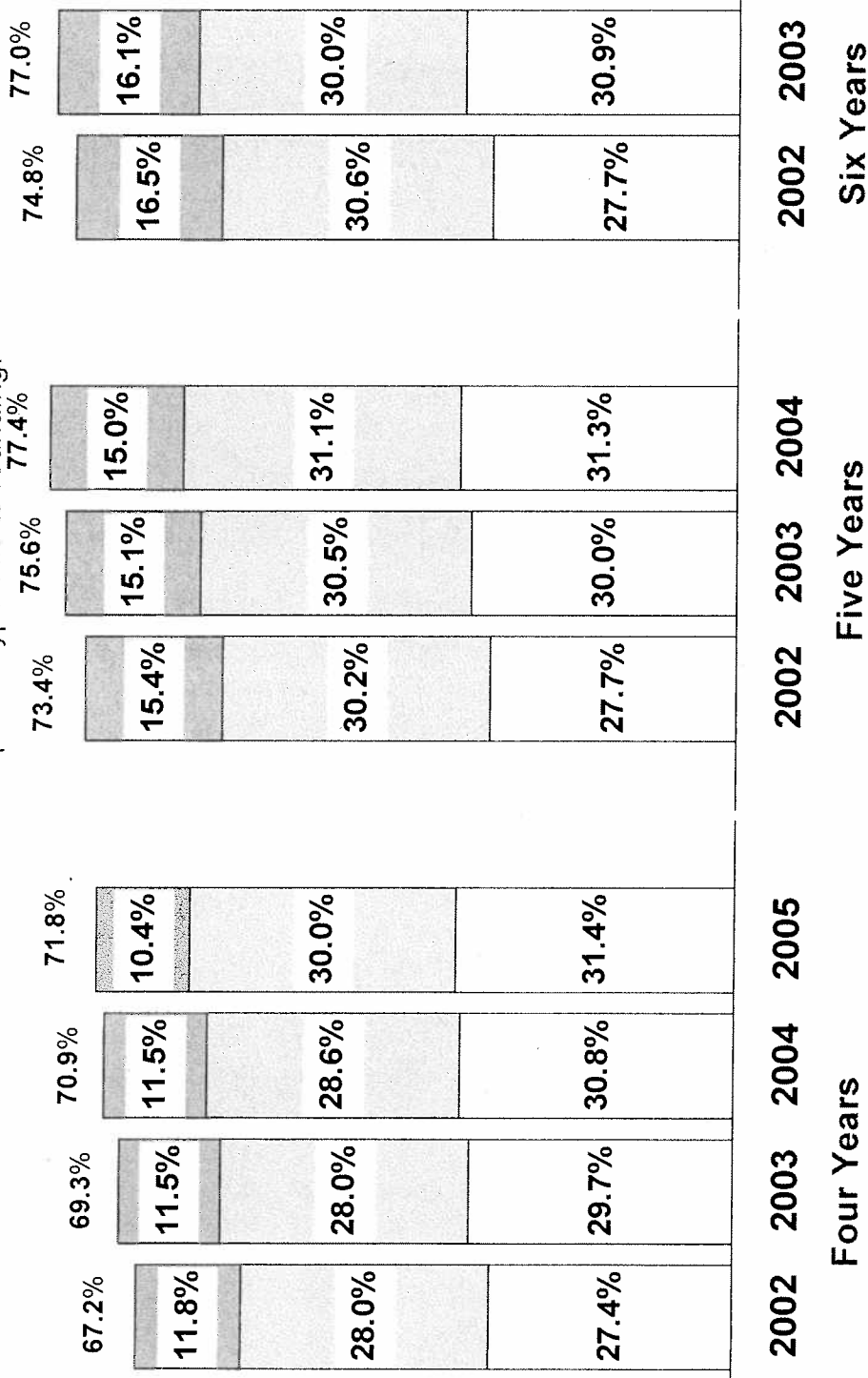
- Percentage of students in the cohort who graduate with a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation

*Regents Diploma with enhanced ELA/Math Assessment Performance (or ELA/Math Aspirational Performance Measure):*

- Percentage of students in the cohort who graduate with any regular diploma (Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation, Regents Diploma, or Local Diploma) and who score 80 or greater on their highest mathematics Regents and 75 or greater on the English Regents

**Figure 1: Statewide, the percentage of cohort members earning a Local, Regents, or Regents with Advanced Designation Diploma**

The cohort graduation rate is presented at the top of the columns. The overall rate may not equal the sum of each diploma type due to rounding.



□ Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation   □ Regents Diploma   ■ Local Diploma

**Figure 2: Aspirational Performance Measures (APM) as a percentage of the statewide cohort compared to the Graduation Rate percentage for students who started 9th grade in 2005**

