This has been a year of tremendous change in the New York State Education Department. Since May 2010, we have witnessed the adoption of a new system of evaluation of teachers and principals, the development and adoption of a new set of teaching standards, the debate and adoption of new graduation standards, and the adoption of the Common Core Standards in English and mathematics. These initiatives have been achieved during a time of transition in the top leadership of the department and under the dark clouds of economic distress. This rapid change has been, in our opinion, overwhelming and without regard for the unintended consequences for our students and schools.

As professionals, high school principals across Long Island have been critical friends of many of these initiatives. We have shared our views in open forums and in written communication. We have done our best to prepare our schools and organizations for the changes. We have arrived at a point, however, where we must say “enough.”

At the May meeting, the Board of Regents voted to eliminate the Regents examinations given in January. We feel this is a short-sighted action that does not take into consideration the immediate and long-term implications for our students and schools. Although we recognize the minor cost-saving measures associated with the elimination of this exam administration, we urge the Board of Regents to recognize the impact such an action has on our students. Just as we are raising standards and urging schools to make sure that all students are college and career ready, the elimination of the January Regents puts a tremendous burden on those students who are striving for the best. At that same meeting, the Board of Regents eliminated the RCT exam for special education students. The Regents exams, many of which are graduation requirements, have therefore become of even greater importance in the lives of our students.

Conceived as end of year assessments, the Regents examinations have served for decades as a culminating assessment of learning for students at the end of a course. In the 1990s, when New York State initiated “A New Compact for Learning,” a January administration of the Regents examinations became a critical second opportunity for students who had difficulties passing the end of year exams but were still striving for a Regents diploma. This continues to be the case for thousands of Long Island students — be they classified students, ESL learners, or simply students who were challenging themselves upward. In addition, research among our members has shown that our most vulnerable students — those who receive free or reduced lunch — are more likely to need that “second chance.”

Elimination of the January Regents examinations would potentially have significant implications on graduation decisions and create tremendous uncertainty for both our high achieving and struggling students. For example: passing the Algebra 2 / Trigonometry examination is a requirement for the Advanced Designation diploma. Prior to this year, if an 11th grade student...
fails the examination it could be retaken in August or seven months later in January — even as the student continues with a new mathematics course. If the student then passes the exam, the school can indicate to colleges (before admission decisions are finalized) that the student is expected to earn an Advanced Diploma. Without the August and January administrations, not only does the student need to wait a year to retake the exam, but he or she will not know the type of diploma that will be earned. For struggling students in Nassau County, a lack of January Regents examinations will mean that success on the requisite examinations — and, therefore, their high school graduation — will be in limbo until just days before their graduation date.

This is simply unacceptable. At the very time we are sending the message of rigorous standards with more high stakes consequences, we are removing a rug from under thousands of students across New York State. Surely, the Board of Regents can find cost savings elsewhere. The stakes are simply too high to find cost savings through elimination of the January Regents examinations.

We urge you to reinstate these examinations — for the benefit of all of our students.

Sincerely,

Sean C. Feeney, Ph.D.
President, Nassau County High School Principals’ Association
Principal, The Wheatley School

Long Island High School Principal Signatories

**Nassau County**
David Seinfeld, Principal, Calhoun High School
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Jay Matuck, Principal, Cold Spring Harbor Junior Senior High School
Dr. Francesco Ianni, Principal, Division Avenue High School
Richard Howard, Principal, East Meadow High School
Glen A. Zakian, Principal, Farmingdale High School
Nanine Cuttitta, Principal, Garden City High School
Thomas J. Russo, Principal, G.W. Hewlett High School
Susan Elliott, Principal, Great Neck South High School
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Dr. Jane Modoono, Principal, Herricks High School
Brijinder Singh, Principal, Hicksville High School
Dr. Carmela Leonardi, Principal, Huntington High School
Joseph Prisinzano, Principal, Jericho High School
Lorraine Poppe, Principal, JFK High School
Dr. Kieran McGuire, Principal, Locust Valley High School
Dr. Gaurav Passi, Principal, Long Beach High School
Joseph Rainis, Principal, Lynbrook High School
Dr. Dean Schlanger, Principal, Manhasset High School
Kathleen Valentino, Principal, MacArthur High School
James Brown, Principal, Malverne High School
Dr. Barbara Williams, Principal, Massapequa High School
Patrick DiClemente, Principal, Massapequa Ames High School
Michael Harrington, Principal, Mepham High School
Michael DiMartino, Principal, New Hyde Park Memorial High School
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Christopher Richardt, Principal, Hampton Bays High School
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William Caulfield, Principal, Rocky Point High School
John Dolan, Principal, Sachem North High School
Ronald Hoffer, Principal, Sayville High School
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John Coady, Principal, Smithtown High School West
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