Include an Opportunity to Learn Index in the NYS Accountability System

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The new federal education law called ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) allows states to design a new accountability system that include school quality indicators, in addition to strictly academic measures such as student test scores and graduation rates.

New York State's accountability system must reflect a strong commitment to learning experiences and opportunities that align with the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of students. The addition of an Opportunity to Learn Index will ensure that all children and youth from prekindergarten through 12th grade have equitable access to a rich education that sparks their curiosity and imagination, and equips them with the essential 21st-century skills of problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and civic leadership.

NYS Allies for Education and Class Size Matters urge the Board of Regents and the Commissioner to incorporate an Opportunity to Learn index in the new NYS accountability system. Such a system would include the following essential, measurable and evidence-based factors:

1. Programs

- Whether the school offers prekindergarten (and whether full or half-day);
- Whether the school offers full-day Kindergarten;
- Average class sizes by grade (which in turn affect student achievement, achievement gaps, school safety and discipline, student engagement, teacher attrition rates etc.);
- How much arts education is offered and whether this meets the state requirements;
- How much physical education is provided and whether this meets the state requirements;

- The extent to which recess aligns with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines.

- Whether the school uses and documents social-emotional supports, restorative practices or other proven positive behavior interventions;

- The number and percentage of students who are not receiving their mandated services, including special education services, ENL/ESL and bilingual classes;

2. Staffing

- The number and percent of teachers in the school who have completed a four-year teacher education program;

- Teacher attrition rate and average years of experience;

- The ratio of counselors per student and in high schools, the ratio of college advisors per student;

- Number of school based team/school psychologist, social worker and/ or designated full-time specialized staff per students with IEP's;

- Number of qualified nurses per student;

- Number of full time librarians and whether there is a library;

- The experience level of administrators (principals, APs, and department chairs) as administrators and as teachers;

- Number of teachers (special education and non-special education) and administrators who have received a full complement of training in evidence-based interventions (such as Orton-Gillingham and others) for children identified with serious reading, writing and math disabilities.

3. Parent involvement

- Whether the school has an active PTA and a School Leadership Team or School-based Management committee that includes parents, with regular trainings and meetings; as verified by the district;

- Whether the school gives annual surveys to students, parents, and teachers, and considers the results for school improvement. (The survey results themselves should not be factored into the

accountability system, but to inform administrators and the school-based management committee of how to improve the school environment.)

4. Other Critical Factors

- The availability of data regarding use of police or law-enforcement surrogates in schools
- Whether the school tracks the types and number of interventions provided to students identified as at risk of dropping out;
- The attendance rate of students and percent of students who are chronically absent.
- Student attrition, discharge, suspension and expulsion rates.

Selected References in Support of Opportunity to Learn Index Indicators

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