THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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TO: District Superintendents
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FROM: Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner

SUBJECT: NY Inspires Transformations: Sunsetting Diploma Assessment Requirements and Moving to One Diploma

DATE: **September 28, 2026**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide school and district leaders with information regarding the next phase of NY Inspires, New York State's comprehensive plan to transform teaching and learning so every student gains the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in school and after graduation. At its September 2026 meeting, the Board of Regents advanced the transition toward a more equitable, student-centered graduation system by directing the New York State Education Department ("NYSED" or "the Department") to take the necessary steps to sunset diploma assessment requirements and move to a single New York State high school diploma.

NY Inspires is designed to implement four key Transformations that represent the realization of the recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures. The initiative incorporates extensive stakeholder engagement, including parents, educators, administrators, school support staff, representatives of higher education, and the business community. Together, the transformations represent New York's vision for teaching and learning to better prepare every student for what comes next.

The implementation plan for the four Transformations was announced in November 2024 along with a timeline consisting of a planning year and three distinct phases for implementation. Consistent with the timeline, sunsetting diploma assessment requirements (Transformation #3) and moving to one diploma (Transformation #4) will go into effect for the 2027-2028 school year. **Students graduating in January 2028 or after will earn one NYS Diploma and will not be required to meet separate diploma assessment requirements (i.e., 4+1 Regents examinations).** These new policies will join New York State Portrait of a Graduate (Transformation #1) that was adopted by the Board of Regents at their July 2025 meeting.

Sunsetting Diploma Assessment Requirements

By sunsetting specific assessment diploma requirements, New York is joining the majority of states that know students are capable of demonstrating their learning in deeper and more meaningful ways than one single measure alone. A high school diploma in New York must reflect meaningful learning and demonstration of the skills necessary for success in the 21st century. The NY Inspires initiative is about stronger instruction, deeper learning, real-world application, and clear evidence of what students know and can do. This could not be further from a reduction in expectations; it is about making use of the right assessment tools – and more of those tools, not less – to build a more rigorous, relevant, and equitable definition of readiness, in collaboration with New York's educators and communities.

The transition away from separate diploma assessment requirements is rooted in New York's Educational Assessment Strategy which emphasizes the use of multiple sources of evidence as well as the importance of matching the intended uses of the results from any assessment tool with the purpose of that assessment. The Regents Examinations are assessments of specific collections of learning standards, typically associated with a yearlong course. As such, their purpose is to report on the degree to which each student shows achievement in those learning standards. However, for a number of years, the Regents Examinations have also been used as graduation requirements and the primary mechanism for federal accountability at the state level (and still other purposes at the district and school levels).

New York is not lowering expectations nor abandoning statewide assessments. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires students to be assessed in high school in English language arts, mathematics, and science. New York also requires participation in a social studies assessment in high school as part of the State ESSA Plan. However, there is no federal requirement that assessments are used as diploma requirements. Regents Examinations should only serve as a rigorous assessment of State learning standards, rather than serving simultaneously as graduation requirements and the primary mechanism for federal accountability. The Department intends to provide further guidance about appropriate uses of Regents examination results and continues not to require or recommend their use as a component of course grades.

The purpose of an assessment as part of the accountability system is to examine student progress across the State to identify areas that may benefit from additional resources or support, with the goal of fostering educational equity. Given that this purpose differs from that of the Regents Examinations**, the Department will develop high school-level accountability assessments that provide comparable statewide evidence of student achievement and create opportunities to explore new approaches to measuring progress and achievement.** More information about the implementation of new high school accountability assessments, amendments to New York's ESSA Plan, and adjustments to the secondary accountability system will be released during the current school year.

While considerable evidence exists to support the use of Regents Examinations as a measure of student achievement in the associated learning standards, no similar evidence exists to support using Regents Examinations as a basis for the issuance of a high school diploma. Put simply, Regents Examinations were not designed to measure graduation readiness – it is not the purpose of these assessments. Statewide assessments remain an important measure of student achievement in New York's Assessment Strategy, but a single test, taken on a single day, cannot fully capture everything a student knows, can do, or needs to be ready for college, careers, civic life, and the future.

To provide a robust picture of students' knowledge, skills, and accomplishments, districts and schools will develop local assessment strategies, following the model of New York's Educational Assessment Strategy. The Department has issued a webinar, template, and initial guidance about the development of local assessment strategies and work has already begun in some districts. Strategies must include multiple high-quality assessment practices that ensure teachers, administrators, parents, and students understand where students are in terms of their learning. This information can come from many sources including daily teacher interactions, classroom assessments, and state-level assessments and include approaches like performance- and project-based assessments and other practices that provide students with decision making opportunities in their learning. Each of those contributes to an overall understanding of student learning and allows for informed decisions about support. Importantly, the local strategy is specific to communities, emphasizes the questions that need to be answered by that school or district, and encompasses local values. This local context is a key component of a culturally responsive-sustaining education. **Districts and schools should begin work immediately on drafting high-level local assessment strategies with an intent to discuss their initial strategies and post them publicly during the 2027-2028 school year.**

Moving to One Diploma

A key element of NY Inspires is the transition from the current three diploma designations: Local, Regents, and Regents with Advanced Designation, to a single New York State high school diploma. Beginning in the 2027-2028 school year, students may pursue different learning experiences and pathways based on their interests, strengths, and goals, while working toward the same diploma and the same high expectations for graduation. **During the transition, the current graduation requirements established in the Commissioner's Regulations Part 100, including the 22 credit requirement, will remain in effect until they are replaced by new competency-based requirements as part of the full NY Inspires implementation beginning in 2029-2030**. Moving to one diploma will create a clearer and more equitable system in which all students have access to meaningful and rigorous learning opportunities while being held to a common standard of excellence.

Districts and schools will continue to support rigorous academic pathways and specialized programs, and student accomplishments will be recognized through State and local seals and endorsements. Students will be able to demonstrate their unique interests

and accomplishments and earn the same statewide credential that will signify readiness for postsecondary life. Importantly, while districts and schools are encouraged to offer diverse learning experiences, all students who satisfy the State's requirements will earn a diploma conferred by the district or school. Further information will be provided about State-level seals and endorsements, as well as guidance for the development of local opportunities to be awarded by districts and schools.

Next Steps

As detailed above, the sunsetting of diploma assessment requirements and move to one diploma will take effect in the 2027-2028 school year. Students planning to graduate before then must satisfy the current graduation requirements. **Credit requirements for earning a diploma remain unchanged for students currently in high school (i.e., students who entered Grade 9 in the 2026-2027 school year or prior).** More detailed information about how the requirements for earning a diploma will change can be seen on the Transformation Timeline section of the NY Inspires webpage.

The Department expects districts and schools to continue implementing current graduation requirements during the 2026-2027 school year while simultaneously preparing for future phases of implementation. **Immediate actions that are strongly recommended include:**

- Establishing school- or district-level NY Inspires implementation teams;
- Reviewing local programs for alignment with the Portrait of a Graduate;
- Evaluating existing capstones, portfolios, internships, and work-based learning opportunities;
- Engaging students, families, educators, and community partners in planning discussions;
- Developing and/or refining a local assessment strategy;
- Exploring regional or cross-district opportunities for partnerships to expand learning experiences for students;
- Ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for students with disabilities, English language learners, and other historically underserved student populations;
- Reviewing the PLAN Pilot which has examples and testimonials from schools engaged in this work; and
- Collaborating with BOCES and other skilled partners to participate in professional learning opportunities.

NY Inspires is about making sure every student graduates ready for what comes next. We are keeping New York's high standards, while giving students more rigorous ways to show what they know and what they can do, not just through exams, but through meaningful demonstrations of learning. At its core, this is about highly effective teaching, deeper learning, and making sure opportunity is available to every student.

Please monitor the NY Inspires website for updates and direct questions regarding NY Inspires to GradMeasures@nysed.gov.