

Elizabeth R. Berlin
Acting Commissioner
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Acting Commissioner Berlin:

We are writing to you to let you know that Hilton Central School District is concerned that the New York State Department of Education is requiring additional testing in the form of field testing. As educators, we appreciate the need to make sure all assessments are valid and reliable; however, the increase in field testing has caused some negative reaction from not only students and teachers, but also parents. The amount of time our students spend on testing has led some parents to refuse to allow their student(s) to participate in the NYS 3-8 operational assessments, which causes us concern. As a district we are supportive of the Common Core Learning Standards, but unfortunately the difference between CCLS and the NYS assessments (both operational tests and field tests) has become non-existent for some of our community members.

With respect to New York State assessments, Hilton has fully participated in this mandate. Part of the assessment mandate includes field testing. While we have participated in field testing, we believe that field test questions embedded in standardized tests are problematic. We understand the importance of field testing, but we are concerned that poorly written field tests can create adverse testing conditions for some students. In addition to being subjected to field test questions embedded in the operational tests, our students are required to participate in stand-alone field tests. Stand-alone field tests necessitate that we carve out time in the instructional day for their administration. We believe that both means of field testing have created a negative assessment culture in our district.

As a participant in "Teaching is the Core" grant, which aims to reduce assessments, we are in agreement with the Commissioner's statement that "high quality assessments are an integral part of teaching and learning," and that "testing should be the minimum necessary to inform effective decision-making in classrooms, schools and districts." As a district, we decided to participate in the grant so that we can help reduce non-essential local testing. It is our hope that we can work with the New York Department of Education to ease the burden of testing.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Surash, Ed.D
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

Also sent to:

Senator Joseph Robach

Senator Robert Ort

Assemblyman Stephen Hawley

Assemblyman Peter Lawrence

NY Regents—Wade Norwood

NY Regents—T. Andrew Brown