

Sonia Lindell, The Business Council of New York State, Inc.

"Commissioner Elia and Ms. Conklin-Spillane, thank you for the opportunity to present remarks on behalf of The Business Council of New York State.

The Business Council is the state's largest employer association. We represent about 2,400 private sector employers, chambers of commerce, non-profits and trade associations, and our members employ an estimated one million New Yorkers.

Our members have a first-hand look at the effects of an education system that does not adequately prepare students for the challenges of college and work.

This is why we strongly support the Common Core standards and Common Core-aligned assessments.

Statistics on the growing "skills gap" are widely known. According to the National Skills Coalition, "middle skill" jobs, those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree, account for 51 percent of the state's labor market, but only 39 percent of workers are trained to this skill level.

We often hear from employers who not only have trouble finding workers with the right technical skills, but with "soft" skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and showing up to work on time.

New York is at a crossroads, and it is critical that we continue implementing the Common Core standards and Common Core-aligned assessments, while making reasonable improvements to ensure that: teachers have access to the professional resources they need to teach to the new standards; test questions are age and grade-level appropriate; and attention is given to ELL and special needs students.

Unfortunately, the backlash against assessments, as manifested in the growing "opt-out" movement, is founded on emotion and misinformation.

Backing away from high education standards and quality assessments, instead of taking steps to improve implementation, would be a disservice to the approximately 6 out of 10 high school graduates who are unprepared for college and the work world...

It would be a disservice to taxpayers, who help foot the bill for \$70 million each year that our community colleges must spend on remediation...

And it would be a disservice to employers, who are struggling to fill open positions.

Supporters of the "opt-out" movement fail to consider these two very basic questions:

How will students fare down the road in college and work if they are not challenged during their K-12 education?

How would a student's future employer respond if their employee chose to simply "opt-out" of an annual evaluation?

We have an opportunity now to improve on what has been a rocky implementation process. The Business Council recommends the following steps to ensure a smoother transition to the new education standards and more rigorous assessments:

- Commission an independent review of state assessments.
- Ensure that teacher certification requirements are strongly aligned with the standards.
- Encourage districts to reduce the number of local assessments.
- Provide further professional development for teachers and principals.
- Increase parent understanding of assessments through fact sheets and forums.

The Business Council will continue to support high quality education standards and assessments. Thank you for your time."