

REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION IN NEW YORK STATE

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NYS Student Testing/Teacher Evaluation

The historic roots of today's current issues related to student testing and teacher evaluation in New York State can provide useful insights to such questions as:

1. When did these issues emerge?
 - a. Concerns over NYS student testing?
 - b. Concerns related to teacher evaluation using student test scores?
2. Was there anyone committed to addressing these concerns when they became known?
3. What are the consequences of failing to address these issues appropriately?

Developing tests for assessing student's abilities has been part of the American education scene for over a century. Testing companies have used proven psychometric techniques to establish high degrees of reliability and validity for their testing products such as the **Stanford** and **California Achievement Tests** and the **Iowa Tests of Basic Skills** as reported in the technical manuals for decades that accompany each test. **Newer tests** developed by **consortiums of states** such as **PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessments** should have similar evidence that they are proven tools for assessing student performance on credible higher standards. Skeptics who question the accuracy of these types of standardized student tests either haven't read or couldn't understand these technical manuals, yet they make bizarre claims that these tests are not valid or reliable.

However, testing companies have increasingly been contracted by **individual states** in compliance with federal mandates to produce annual reviews of student performance. These tests are also called standardized tests, but it's not possible to tell how authentic they are since evidence of their accuracy is not readily available. And publishers of these tests do make mistakes that are uncovered on occasion (mostly in the scoring and reporting phases), and are justifiably punished with severe fines when they occur.

But a much bigger concern in student testing is the "cut score" that determines proficiency levels. The cut score is established by the State Education Department in consultation with the test development company and selected educators. Setting the cut score is **a subjective decision**. Set it low enough and everybody wins—teachers are doing a great job, parents think their kids are learning the right stuff to prepare them for life, real estate brokers promote high education attainment for their communities, politicians keep appropriating more money for what they perceive to be a high quality education product, test companies continue to get new contracts, etc.—pure contentment in the education community..

In New York, the State testing program reported student proficiency rates for English and math statewide above 80% **for decades**. At the same time, the Federal student testing program called the National Assessment of Education Progress (**NAEP**)—**considered the gold standard in testing**, was reporting proficiency results just over 30% for New York State students. **That's a 50% discrepancy**—and practically no one in the New York State education community seemed to be concerned even though employers were reporting that graduates of the public schools were not qualified for entry employment. Similar complaints came from the military and colleges.

It is interesting to note that about the same time as the New York testing program was reporting its student proficiency scores in the 80%+ range almost 20 years ago, **Massachusetts's students scored only 38% on its statewide tests—almost identical to the federal NAEP result (1998)**. This state took action when these results were emerging, greatly improved student test scores over the next decade and now its educational system is considered one of the best in the nation.

A little more than a decade ago, the media began reporting numerous problems with New York State Regents tests developed by the NYSED (e.g., Math A, physics, etc.). In response, representatives of several organizations including School Boards, the State's superintendents association, the Business Council, the New York State Senate and the Governor's office **initially** endorsed a proposal to establish an independent review of state testing that would be housed at Cornell University. The **reviews** would be conducted **by outside testing experts** and provide objective feedback to the State Education Department as well as the education community on each State test. Comparisons with other states testing program would have provided relevant comparisons for determining cost-effectiveness of New York's testing program. This would have made possible **true transparency** for New York's emerging testing program that was assuming greater weight under the Federal **No Child Left Behind law** passed by Congress and signed by the President in 2002. The proposal was included in the Governor Pataki's budget, but was eventually eliminated due to political pressure from the Commissioner of Education as he perceived this initiative to be a threat to an area he thought to be his exclusive domain.

Besides the NYSED, there were two other members of the education community that refused to endorse the independent review of State testing a decade ago: NYSUT and the New York State Assembly. Is the current student testing crisis the result of these three entities failing to act years ago to establish a system that would have guaranteed transparency? And why is NYSUT involved now in student testing? The answer is simple—these "faulty tests" are now required to evaluate its teacher members—a high stakes consequence.

So what is different today that has made student testing so controversial? Well, it seems that Bill Gates, our billionaire friend to education, is responsible for starting the movement for higher standards under the name, **Common Core**. The roll-out from design to the implementation of the Common Core standards has been a disaster acknowledged by practically everyone. But the most dramatic and far reaching consequence has been student performance on the new State tests that are now aligned to the Common Core standards. And

what do these new State test results tell us? Surprise! New York State students are now performing at the same level of proficiency (i.e. approximately 33%) as the Federal NAEP results.

Fast forward to the near present, Governor Andrew Cuomo was elected to a second term and he promised to target education as one of his major priorities. He does this in the midst of an emerging new teacher evaluation system developed by the State Education Department using private contractors for consultation. The initial proposal combines traditional classroom observation (50% of the total score) with a combination of State student testing and local assessments (accounting for the remaining 50%). The school districts charged with the teacher observation portion of the new system produced results that showed almost every teacher in the State to be proficient.

Now we have the perfect storm for the Governor to demonstrate his leadership in the education arena. The Governor asked, "How could almost 99% of the teachers obtain a proficiency rating from the observation process when their students demonstrate only 33% proficiency on the State tests." So what does the Governor do? To counter the high teacher observation ratings that account for 50% of the total teacher evaluation profile, he demands that the other 50% be the individual teacher results on the **State** student tests which would eliminate the local assessments portion that had previously been proposed by the NYSED/ Board of Regents and accepted by many in the education community as the **initial** phase of a system-wide teacher evaluation. To the Governor's credit, he relied on the best measurement tool that education had to offer: objective, reliable, and valid tests constructed by expert psychometricians.

So now we have open warfare between the State's teacher union and the Governor that would be humorous if the stakes were not so catastrophic. For its part, NYSUT and affiliated parent groups have encouraged parents to opt-out of the State's testing program, thereby rendering the tests useless for teacher evaluation purposes in many schools. And they appear to be succeeding as more than 200,000 students statewide opted out with some districts reporting more than 50% of its students refusing to take the April 2015 tests in English and math.

In its defense, the teachers union is fighting for the professional life of its members. They perceive the actions of the Governor would destroy teacher morale. And they are right. Experienced teachers are retiring or leaving the education field in unprecedented numbers.

NYSUT's strategy has created a significant challenge to the education field—questioning whether the field of education can measure its results. Edward Thorndyke, the father of measurement, said, "If it exists, it can be measured." Astro-physicists can measure the size, composition and orbit of an object in space that is billions of miles away. So now the testing field will have to prove that it can indeed measure something that does exist—the true performance of students in our schools based on verifiable standards that will mean something in their future lives as college attendees, workers, parents, intelligent voters, care givers, community leaders, environmental stewards, etc.

The current situation appears to be a battle among three entities including the Board of Regents/SED, the teachers union including their parent advocates and the Governor. But this is not really the whole case. There are many other segments that are affected by the current crisis. However, the response from significant others has been muted or nonexistent. New York State's testing company (Pearson) failed to respond to objections from parents and classroom teachers that claimed its tests were not an accurate assessment of students. Where was the national testing industry's response to its testing products as similar complaints are being made in other states? What do teacher-preparation colleges and educational research organizations have to say regarding these issues? What about the State Legislature that has to approve the expenditures for the State's testing program? Should we also include on this list the Business Council, the School Boards Association, the State's superintendents association, the State's administrator associations, the State's PTA and dozens of other impacted groups? Perhaps, these organizations are talking amongst themselves, but they need to become knowledgeable about psychometrics and then be aggressively proactive in the public domain to clarify and balance the dialogue that is occurring frequently in the media.

Governor Cuomo seemed to take the initiative again, with the appointment of a new task force to review the Common Core Standards which will also include a review of the quality of state tests, NYS's curriculum guidance and resources as well as how to reduce the number and duration of all tests. The Governor also wants New York to develop its own standards as well as charging the task force to include a parent review of locally-developed tests. Conspicuously absent from the Governor's charge to the task force is the State's teacher evaluation system utilizing student test scores.

But let's cut to the chase and examine what the real issues are. First and foremost, **tests designed to assess student skills and knowledge are not a valid measure of individual teacher evaluation.** These tests can be used to form a general view of how students are performing on defined skill sets that represent a sample of student learning at a given point in time. Comparisons among schools and districts is also useful to obtain an overview of how the State's students are performing on similar tasks. However, there are too many extraneous factors that influence student performance for an individual teacher's class. There are numerous research studies that would support this view.

Taking tests is a critical element in a democratic society and is a routine requirement employed by business, the military, colleges and many other entities. Most of these tests are high-stakes for the individual test taker. However, New York State's tests are not considered high-stakes tests for the individual student (i.e., the individual students will not be punished or rewarded for his/her participation). Thus, student motivation for taking tests must be taken into account when they have no consequence for the individual student. This factor alone should prevent student tests from being used for teacher evaluation.

Board of Regents Chancellor Meryll Tisch summed up the present situation as quoted in an April 25, 2015 Journal News article: "It so clear to me that we are having endless battles and we're moving in place." Her solution to the problem is simply to extend the deadlines to school districts for implementing the new teacher evaluation process. The Governor's spokesman has said that the law requires a November 15 deadline for complying with the implementation of the SED approved teacher evaluation system and only limited hardship cases would be temporarily exempt. The teachers union and their allies will continue to fight tooth and nail against any evaluation system that uses student tests as a significant factor (i.e. greater than 10%) for assessing its members.

Summary

So what does the landscape look like now for the State's two assessment systems? Here's a quick REVIEW:

1. Although the new student testing aligned with Common Core standards and teacher evaluation are separate processes, they became intertwined because they were both being developed at the same time under the direction of the New York State Education Department (NYSED).
2. Under the **No Child Left Behind** law and the **Race to the Top** funding requirements, all states are required to use student testing as part of the teacher evaluation process or face loss of federal funding. Tying the **Common Core Standards** to the federal testing mandate appears to be a **disguised attempt by the Federal government to take over education in the United States**
3. Although there were strong objections (including litigation by NYSUT) to the use of student tests for teacher evaluation in New York State, a tentative agreement was reached among the significant education groups including the teacher union. The portion allotted to **State** student testing was set at 20% with the local districts developing local assessments for the remaining 30%.
4. The observation process of the teacher evaluation system yielded a highly questionable score of near perfection in rating teacher proficiency.
5. The Governor, reacting to the high proficiency ratings from the observation segment, used the power of the budget to force a new teacher evaluation system demanding that 50% of the score be allotted to the State's student tests. However, a compromise was reached whereas NYSED will decide what proportion state tests will count. (Note: this will be the third version of the State's teacher evaluation system in two years).
6. The damage done to the integrity of student testing as a direct result of the teacher evaluation controversy presents a serious challenge. Reacting to the demands of the Governor for more student testing to evaluate teachers, NYSUT and its parent allies have created a movement that has created a serious challenge to the value of standardized student testing.

7. Governor Cuomo has created a new task force to review the Common Core Standards and this review will also include an examination of New York State's testing program.
8. President Obama has put forth a new proposal to limit testing and this could be the beginning of a review of the Federal mandates that have caused much strife in the education field. (10/24/15)

Recommendations

Where do we go from here? Here are some suggestions:

In the Short Term

- A. Restore balance in the debate over what and how to teach. A lopsided focus on only English and math ignores the other content areas that are essential for a complete educational experience for youth. Social studies, science, career and technical programs, art, music, etc. as well as extra curricula are also faced with challenges regarding content and assessment. New York State needs an accurate assessment system in all major areas that are important to prepare youth for successful transition to adulthood.
What gets measured gets done. Failure to assess student outcomes in other fields is a recipe for a continued lop-sided and ineffective educational system.
- B. The current education community needs to come together to create a new long-term vision of how best to educate the youth under its stewardship. This vision should be world class, research-based and utilize the advantages of proven best practices wherever they are found.
- C. Stop the war between the Governor and the teachers union. Andrew Cuomo will need the support of the teachers union as he seeks a third term (how many counties did he carry in 2014?). The teachers union needs to turn down the negative rhetoric on student testing. Both have to work to ensure that the student testing system is accurate and useful to guide educational policy at the state and local levels.
- D. Delay implementing the New York State teacher evaluation system as long as possible in the hope that there will be some relief from the federal government by relaxing the untenable use of student test scores for teacher evaluation. Hopefully, the new administration in Washington (i.e., 2016) will see the light because of the mounting evidence against this approach. The announcement by the Obama administration on October 24, 2015 that calls for the reduction of testing is a positive sign that this can be accomplished in the near future.

New York State's federal representatives in the Senate and House of Representatives should become well-informed on these issues and work to overturn the federal mandates that are harmful to education such as using student test scores for individual teacher evaluations.

- E. Given the level of hostility directed at Pearson, the NYSED was right to discontinue its involvement with that testing company in order to restore confidence in the State's testing program. The new testing contractor must be able to convince the education community that it can develop authentic tests to measure student performance.

A future option for New York is to join a consortium such as the **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)**—an eleven state plus Washington, D.C. collaborative or **Smarter Balanced Assessments** —a 17 state collaborative. (Note: the **PARCC** collaborative appears to be disintegrating as a number of states have dropped out including the lead state, Massachusetts).

However, Governor Cuomo has recently stated that new higher standards and the assessment systems for students should reflect New York State interests and priorities. This would mean utilizing an independent testing contractor and there are several highly qualified firms to do this. (Note: The replacement testing contractor for Pearson, **Questar**, does not appear to have the capacity to create the long-term student testing system New York State will need.)

Whoever is responsible for developing future student tests should work with NYSED to hold public forums and also to produce readable guides for parents and the media to respond to the misinformation reported in the media about testing. Otherwise, the anti-testing critics might succeed in demanding completely new models of student assessment (minus standardized tests).

Another option for addressing many of the concerns about too much testing would require the NYSED to test each student on a limited number of items using sophisticated random sampling. This procedure would drastically reduce the testing time required of each student and still provide highly reliable and valid results. For further information on this procedure, Dr. Nicolas Argyrous (518) 8994 4274 should be contacted.

- F. Create an independent testing agency in the State of New York to oversee the development of all tests developed by contracted test developers and the NYSED. There are too many consequences to allow this process to go on in secret. The entire test process must become **transparent** and accepted by all the major players in the State's education system. New York State needs a J.D. Power & Associates objective source for ensuring that student testing products are the best that they can be.
- G. **The fundamental purpose of observing teacher performance should be for professional improvement.** The teacher observation process should provide continuous feedback from a competent mentor including specific suggestion for correcting poor teaching techniques (**formative evaluation**). Beginning teachers and teachers who are

struggling need frequent reviews to ensure that their students have optimal opportunities to learn. It makes no sense to wait to the end of a year to replace a teacher who has been performing badly for many months. School districts should be given technical assistance from a proven professional agency in implanting a high quality formative evaluation system for every content/program area. Recently retired master teachers would be a great source for mentors. If a high quality formative observation process is in place, it would not be surprising that the State-mandated observation would result in high proficiency ratings—the poor performing teachers would have either improved or they would have been dismissed prior to the summative observation.

The NYSED is now requiring the use of observation as a **summative evaluation** procedure (i.e. to make a consequential judgment about a teacher’s abilities as a consideration for dismissal). Last year, school districts reported that nearly all its faculty were performing at acceptable levels which was not a credible result given the performance of their students on the State tests and continued complaints about the quality of graduates from the public schools. Thus, the State-required observation segment of the teacher evaluation process must be redesigned.

Employee/staff evaluations have been a major focus of business, the military, and numerous other organizations for decades. An independent group of experts from diverse occupations should be charged with developing a defensible and valid system for rating teacher performance. The benchmarking model would replicate the best system/s from any field. The result may not be a “one size fits all” approach given the diversity of New York State’s school districts. The teaching profession needs to know what the acceptable performance criteria are for a first year teacher, a fourth year teacher seeking tenure and an experienced teacher that can serve as a model for younger colleagues. In any case, the final recommended teacher observation process must be able to demonstrate that it is a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of a teacher’s ability to teach effectively.

- H. The curriculum to teach the higher standards is to be developed by teachers. They will need assistance to be able to teach their students new concepts and skills. Some of that expertise will come from continued professional development offered by teacher-preparation colleges and expert content consultants. However, the major source of these new teaching skills will come from colleagues who have developed proven ways to incorporate the higher standards into their teaching craft.
- I. **A culture of sharing best practices*** must become the norm in New York State. A statewide system for facilitating sharing best practices among like-minded colleagues is the most cost-effective way to ensure that teachers will acquire the technique to assist their students in learning the higher standards required to face the challenges of living in a modern society.

*see proposal for creating a **Statewide Best Practice Network for Educators**

In the Near Future

Education has become the recognized engine throughout most of the world as the best vehicle for improving the quality of life for future generations. Technology continues to provide greater opportunities for the “good life” for those who are qualified to take advantage of its’ benefits. New skills will be required at an accelerated pace for our youth to compete successfully in a global economy. Education systems that cannot respond quickly to global change will be short-changing future generation of students.

New York State’s education system is archaic and is not a workable model for ensuring a quality education for all in the 21st century and beyond. Recent history demonstrates how the New York State’s education policies and implementation strategies have been either ineffectual or erroneous. It seems to take the leadership in Albany forever to develop credible responses to outside mandates such as a teacher evaluation process. Contrasts this performance with the performance of other organizations when they have been challenged and how they responded. Witness, for example, how the military transformed itself in fighting different threats over the last century. Or how the medical community responded to world-wide crisis such as EBOLA, AIDS or other natural disasters. There are many other examples in the business community where organizations have succeeded in facing the challenges of rapid change.

A state’s education delivery system should be able to transform itself in the face of continuing challenges. The leadership of a state’s educational components must be able to discern emerging problems in the early stages and act decisively with credible solutions. This will require flexibility to use the necessary resources to respond without undue political pressure.

Many of the individuals involved in making crucial education policy, funding and monitoring decisions in New York have little understanding of the contemporary education issues. It is not realistic to expect significant change in the existing structure in the near future; however, there are steps that could conceivably improve New York States education delivery system.

The first step should start at the top with the Board of Regents. This organization provides an ideal buffer for the NYSED and thus, can limit the political influence from the Governor and the Legislature.

Prior to becoming eligible to be elected (not appointed) to the Board, all applicants should first be screened, preferable by important stakeholders in a given region or perhaps by a contracted firm specializing in these appraisals, to ensure that future members will be qualified to perform the duties of a Regent. The process for selecting the new Regent from Westchester County was exemplary and produced a highly qualified person, Judy Johnson.

Future Regents should be proficient in understanding educational research, know the basics of psychometric measurement in education, have experience formulating policy for large

organizations and articulate policies developed by consensus with other Board members. Regents representing a given region should be held accountable by the educational stakeholders in that geographic area including school districts, the business community, taxpayers and parents. No single Regent should have excessive power over the entire Board, especially one who can hire private consultants and then act as a one-person Board.

The New York State Education Department attempts to play a leadership role among the key players in the State's education community. Once a model for other states; the current SED is a shell of its former self. It's been stripped of its content and other specialist's decades ago. Recent education commissioners have not been able to provide the leadership required for managing many of the complex aspects of the State's educational system.

Insiders know that the most important focus of SED employees is the Board of Regents. Staff spend countless hours preparing for Regents regular and sub-committee meetings. In addition, individual Regents frequently make direct requests to SED employees—apparently perceiving these staff members are available for their personal interests. This time-consuming effort must be reversed. SED staff should be spending most of their time keeping abreast of the latest research and best practices in the field and responding to the needs of school districts by providing quality technical assistance, especially to struggling schools. NYSED will need additional resources in order to accomplish this, especially if they want to attract highly competent personnel who are recognized leaders in their respective fields.

All state departments are bureaucratic organizations and operate under regulations that guarantee mediocre. The Civil Service system for gaining entry and obtaining promotions does not award creativity, efficiency, responsiveness to target populations served, but they do guarantee employment for life with great benefits. This is not likely to change for the New York State's education department and that is acceptable as long as the assigned tasks to the bureaucrats only require routine decisions for required functions such as distributing funds to school districts, monitoring mandated reporting, and the like.

However, the leadership of the NYSED at the top of this organization must operate completely differently. Working under a highly capable Commissioner, the recruitment and retention of a select number of professional managers should be a top priority for ensuring that New York will once again be a leader in the education field. These managers would oversee the assessments, standard setting, technical assistance including continuing professional development, research, evaluation, innovation and best practices, etc. They should not be civil service positions and be solely accountable to the Commissioner/Board of Regents. They should be highly respected in the education/ business/professional fields. Their compensation, along with the Commissioner, should be equivalent to similar positions in other fields. The Commissioner should also be able to hire independent consultants for advice and guidance in areas not available to the Department. New York State needs the best minds to be working in education and not settle for what it can get for Civil Service or other regulated pay scales.

New York State should look at the way other states have organized their educational systems. Massachusetts's educational department appears to function better than most and is worth looking at.

New York State should go beyond looking at only educational systems operated by other states and benchmark successful business models for large organizations that can respond to the rapidly changing challenges that stem from living in a modern society. In this scenario, the Board of Regents would become a Board of Directors and they would hire a Chief Operating Officer (CEO) (i.e., in place of the Commissioner of Education).

Stakeholders (similar to stockholders) would hold the Board of Directors accountable for meeting defined goals for cost-effective performance in the education field. In addition to annual student performance on highly accurate tests, student feedback would include longitudinal data after the PreK-12 experience. Persons attending post-secondary schools would also be included in the survey so that higher education can be held accountable for its efforts as well. Comparisons with other states would be useful on commonly accepted and valid criteria, but New York State should go beyond the U.S. and use the best performing countries and schools in the world as its mirror.

Surveys of businesses, military, nonprofits, government agencies, etc. that typically hire or supervise New York State graduates would supplement the student experiences and provide ongoing feedback from their perspective. Experts in content fields would be called upon to offer continuous suggestions for updating standards regarding what is being taught in the classroom.

Data from the above sources should guide policy formation by the Board of Regents (or Directors) and be the basis for charging the CEO of the NYSED with comparable target goals that she/he would be required to meet.

In the meantime, the State Legislature should commission a study to delineate the roles of the NYSED in its relationship to the Board of Regents to optimize each agency's performance. The selection of a highly competent commissioner with impeccable education credentials and a proven record of managing a large organization should also be given the highest priority.

The challenge of what to teach will be a constant. Rather than wait for another Bill Gates or some other outsider to tell New York State what its youth needs to learn from their PreK-12 school years, the State should create its own system based on a three-point strategy:

1. Institute a comprehensive student follow-up system whereby the State's education providers can continually make adjustments in the curriculum based on the findings that would include:
 - a. What was taught to graduates and continues to be useful?
 - b. What has little or no value in their performance of life's roles?
 - c. What they needed, but did not get taught?

2. Solicit opinions from experts in each content area that would ensure that all the material taught in the classroom is up-to-date and accurate.
3. Focus on discovering what others are doing in other states and countries that produce better results than what New York State schools are achieving in critical areas. Encourage replication of programs and transfer of best practices among the State's educators.

Whatever is decided upon as appropriate content for the PreK-12, an accurate assessment system must be in place at all levels to successfully monitor results. The testing industry must be held accountable for creating measures that can demonstrate not only high degrees of reliability, but also produce a variety of validity evidence including: concurrent, construct and predictive. The results of student assessments are the key ingredients for guiding important decisions in the educational system and they must be credible and transparent to all members of the education community.

The Long Term Solution

All efforts to continue to pour money into the PreK-12 or PreK-14 hole will eventually prove to be a myopic vision of what really was needed to create a delivery system that responded to society's needs in the 21st century and beyond. Humans will be living well into their nineties on average before the turn of this century and will need access to continued learning resources for all of their lives.

There are five major trends that should be taken into account before redesigning the way society determines how best to meet the continuing needs of all its members in the future.

They are:

1. The speed of change and the need to continually upgrade skills and knowledge for everyone to maximize performance in all of life's roles.
2. The new opportunities to learn anywhere, from anyone due to availability of information through new technologies and learning sources.
3. The changing relationship between teacher and learner.
4. The need to create a culture for lifelong learning for all persons throughout one's lifetime.
5. The need to utilize **targeted continuing learning**, especially for adults, to address priority local, regional and national issues, concerns, interests, and problems.

What is needed is a seamless transition from birth to the end of life through a system of lifelong learning that provides an individual the opportunity to enhance his/her life at any time and at any place. An individual will need basic tools to be able to take advantage of all the learning opportunities that will be increasingly available from multiple sources and that can readily be accomplished by the early teen age years in a formal schooling environment.

The shelf-life of information is decreasing as new information is generated at warp speed (i.e., information in almost any field becomes out-of-date or is found to be erroneous shortly after it is learned—sometimes as short as two years in fields like engineering). Think of the implications of that in the fields of medicine and other critical areas necessary for preserving and enhancing the quality of life.

Technology has created unlimited opportunities to obtain new information 24 hours a day and as near as one's cell phone or home computer. The social networks provide an opportunity to gain new insights from anyone on any topic. Numerous on-line and non-traditional learning sources are available through the internet (e.g., Great Courses). Most humans are social animals and they will increasingly become affiliated with groups of like-minded persons due to increased leisure time—an ideal source for new learnings and sharing.

Many of these new information sources are not screened for accuracy, biases or errors and will need the continued involvement of an objective source such as a teacher or mentor for these new information sources to be truly effective. However, the traditional role between teacher and student at the beginning of the 20th century will not work in future learning activities. The concept of the teacher standing in front of a class as the sole source of new information is not credible even today. Facilitators of future learning should assume the learner already has or can easily obtain a great deal of new information on any topic. The real task is to ascertain the authenticity of the relevant information and determine how it can be used to improve one's performance in life's roles or how it can be used to enhance community life.

The availability of vast storage houses of information is of little value if no one is utilizing it. A **culture of lifelong learning** must be created and encouraged at every level in order for the human species to maximize its potential. This will require completely new systems to support lifelong learning and involve many nontraditional organizations that will be in the forefront of this effort including public libraries, community-based organizations, ad hoc citizen groups, social and ethnic organizations, local government agencies, etc.

The complexity of modern life will create increasing challenges for communities as well as other geographic entities. New research by a well-known economist, Dr. Raj Chetty, seems to have caught the attention of top Democrats (Hillary Clinton) and Republicans (Jeb Bush) as he has demonstrated that the top priority in overcoming poverty in this country is to improve mobility in a community. A major focus of lifelong learning must also include a clear focus on how **targeted new learnings**, especially for adults, will address priority issues such as improving mobility in poor communities.

Lifelong Learning Consortiums** funded by the State would be an ideal way to ensure that a culture of lifelong learning will be successful for both enhancing the quality of individual and community life in the 21st century and beyond.

Note: See narrative on **Lifelong Learning Consortiums for further description of this approach.

THE BROADER VISION:

Governor Andrew Cuomo was able to overcome many obstacles in his effort to build the new bridge across the Hudson River. He had the vision and fortitude to oversee the construction of something that would last 100 years or more with the expectation of enormous economic and social benefits that will enhance the quality of life for many.

He can have another opportunity to make a lasting imprint in another vital area: **learning for all New Yorkers**. This narrative has described some of the forces that are and will be affecting our society for the next 100 years. How will these forces impact on the skills and knowledge required of future workers, parents, community members and citizens? Who will be responsible for identifying the content of learning in an age of rapid change? What types of infrastructure needs to be in place to take maximum advantage of all the learning opportunities that will be available in the future?

The answer to these questions and more can be addressed in a new initiative by the Governor and supported by the State Legislature:

Establish a permanent committee on the future of learning.

Unlike **short-term** commissions of the past that solicited opinions from all the major special-interest groups in the State, the **Future of Learning Committee** will be composed of **rotating experts** in a variety of fields with no attachments to the existing educational delivery systems (e.g., no Board of Regents/NYSED, no unions, no professional educational organizations, etc.). The major focus of the Future of Learning Committee will be **new and proven** knowledge that will allow New Yorkers to compete successfully in a fast-changing global world. The Future of Learning Committee will not make policy, but will make recommendations to the Legislature, the Governor and to the public at large pertaining to learning for all members of society from birth to advancing ages. It is expected that this Committee would be active for the next 100 years and beyond to provide continuing insight regarding the what, when, where and how New Yorkers continue to learn the vital skills and knowledge they will need to face the future successfully.

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