

Jennifer Smith, Teacher, Questar BOCES

"I work at a high school for students with emotional and behavioral issues. My students have poor self-regulation skills and have ended up in this program as a result. Most of my students are expected to take and pass the Regents exams. They come to school each day with their heads held low and their self-esteem even lower. They call this program a "retard school" and tell me they feel "retarded" despite all my clarification and evidence to tell them otherwise.

I have one tenth grader who has recently come to realize his third grade reading comprehension skills are too weak to be able to grasp the concepts taught in Global 10. I have promised to support him and teach him strategies to help pass the Global exam. He has refused to come to my class for four weeks now. His goal is to lay concrete as a career.

Two of my students are on CDOS track. This means their CSE team has determined their academic skills are too low to meet the requirements for a high school diploma. They are currently enrolled in my Participation in Government class, even though the course is no longer necessary for them to complete the program. However, because of APPR, they are still expected to take the post-assessment related to my evaluation. They are not likely to retain the information I've been teaching and will likely guess their way through the exam.

I have a ninth grader who has admitted to me that he guesses on the pre- and post-assessments related to his teachers' APPR scores. He knows, like the seniors, that his scores have no impact on his grades. We have to prove growth when creating our targets. Now, teachers have to hope that he correctly guesses at least one more question in June.

I wonder why my students need to retain information about thousands of years of history for a test that ultimately will not play much of a role in their lives? I wonder why I can't teach my students about skills they will need to use on a daily basis in order to keep a job, stay safe, and avoid injury, jail time, or even death? I wonder why I have to make predictions months in advance for students who are angry, avoid school, and refuse work on a regular basis?

Their behaviors are directly related to their diagnoses. I can use all the strategies, I can attend all the professional development opportunities, but I will never be able to wave a magic wand and find a cure. Please find ways to support your special education teachers. We care so deeply about our students and we are stuck between wanting to do what's best for them and protecting our positions in your schools.

Sincerely, Eighth year special education teacher"