

LDA

Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, Inc.

November 16, 2009

**1190 Troy-Schenectady
Road
Latham, NY 12110
518/608-8992
Fax: 518/608-8993
statelda@ldanys.org
www.ldanys.org**

Rebecca Cort, Ed. D.
Deputy Commissioner
Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
New York State Education Department
One Commerce Plaza, Room 1606
Albany, NY 12234

LDA Regional Affiliates:

**LDA of the Capital District
(aka Wildwood Programs)**
2995 Curry Road Extension
Schenectady, NY 12303

LDA of Central New York
722 West Manlius Street
East Syracuse, NY 13057

LDA Life & Learning Services
339 East Avenue, 4th Floor
Rochester, NY 14604

LDA of Long Island
44 South Elmwood Avenue
Montauk, NY 11954

LDA of the Mohawk Valley
401 Columbia Street
Utica, NY 13502

LDA of New York City, Inc.
27 West 20th Street,
Room 303
New York, NY 10011

LDA of the Southern Tier
112 Nanticoke Avenue
Endicott, NY 13760

LDA of Western New York
2555 Elmwood Avenue
Kenmore, NY 14217

**Chartered by the Board
of Regents of the
University of the State of
New York as a Non-
Profit Corporation for
Education, Medical,
Social and Research
Needs.**

**An affiliate of LDA of
America, Inc.**

Dear Dr. Cort,

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State is a parent-driven organization providing a wide range of advocacy and support services to individuals with learning disabilities, neurological impairments and other disabilities with similar characteristics. One of our primary roles is to provide educational advocacy to ensure that students receive a free and appropriate education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and No Child Left Behind. Students with Learning Disabilities represent the largest category within the special education population. In 2008, 40% of the total students with disabilities, ages 4-21, were classified with Learning Disabilities.

We are opposed to extending the current safety net for students with disabilities, including continuing to use the Regents Competency Tests as an alternative assessment -- these tests are not accessible, have not been upgraded, and are not aligned to the curriculum or instruction.

While we are waiting for the Regents to initiate much needed comprehensive reforms on graduation requirements, the Safety Net must be revised so that it is universal for all students, and not just available for students with disabilities. Anything less is discriminatory, and does not meet the standard of ensuring students with disabilities will continue to have the opportunity to earn a Regents local diploma of value. Without including all students, the local diploma becomes as meaningless as the IEP Diploma currently is.

Instead of extending the current safety net, the Regents must move forward to initiate comprehensive reforms. They need to create a meaningful Regents Diploma based on the NYS learning standards, Career Development and Occupational Studies, and have multiple pathways to make it accessible for all students. This would end the current system of segregation where students with disabilities are branded by the type of diploma they receive.

The current Safety Net was started in 1996, and was extended in 2001 and again in 2003 for the purpose of gathering more data and providing time to make revisions to graduation requirements that would ensure all students have the fair opportunity to earn a valued diploma and access to postsecondary options. There has been no significant progress in the 13 years of the Safety Net for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, Black and Latino students.

The time for action is now to institute reforms that will ensure all students can achieve high standards and a diploma of value.

Sincerely,



Mike Helman
President