

CONNETQUOT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ISLIP
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January 12, 2016

Dear Commissioner Elia and Board of Regents:

The Connetquot SEPTA, together with the administration of the Connetquot Central School District, would like to express concerns and make some suggestions regarding the change in opportunities afforded to special education students. As the requirements for Regents and local diplomas' have intensified, a portion of our special education students are struggling to obtain a NYS endorsed diploma. This is of great concern as it limits post-secondary opportunities for our special education children.

- There are far too many restrictions and far too few options for students with disabilities to receive a Regents diploma or a local diploma option, which pigeon-holes students into a CDOS credential;
- The lack of an alternate assessment such as the Regents Competency Exams that used to provide a vehicle by which special education students could demonstrate their mastery of high school curriculum decreases the likelihood that special education students will be able to graduate from high school with any recognized diploma;
- Some of our students are not eligible for the New York State Alternate Assessment and yet will not earn a local diploma or Regents diploma. It is unreasonable to assume that all students will fit into one of these options. Students with special needs do not fit into a "One size fits all" model currently pervasive in the graduation credentialing;
- CDOS requirements significantly narrow the number of class options for students;
- CDOS limits the life choices – many employment industries do not recognize the CDOS as a high school diploma.

Without the Regents Competency Tests (RCT), or alternate pathways that allow students with disabilities to achieve a local diploma, the students graduating in 2016 and beyond who cannot pass five Regents exams will not earn a widely recognized high school diploma. Therefore, students who have otherwise succeeded, at the level available to them due to their disability, cannot enroll in college courses or compete for jobs that require a recognized high school diploma, neither can they enlist in the armed forces and give service to our country. Limiting post-secondary options for students, especially those with special needs, disadvantages our workforce and severely limits the future earning potential of our special needs population.

Our recommendation would be to make the CDOS a valid local diploma option, or offer multiple pathways to obtain a local or Regents diploma. Consider:

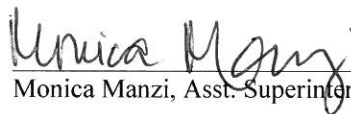
- Reinstating an alternate means to prove content competency such as the Regents Competency Tests (RCT).
- Portfolio assessments and other alternatives, such as presentations rather than paper and pencil Regents examinations, for content area assessments and/or
- Work based learning opportunities in specific content areas.

It is our belief that all children deserve the chance to succeed and be provided the resources that will allow them to do so. Special education students, who successfully complete their coursework, as indicated in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), deserve a diploma endorsed by New York State Department of Education. Current NYS graduation requirements and recent changes to diploma types makes this possibility unattainable for a portion of our special education students. Diplomas offered by New York State do not accurately consider the learning needs of many of our special education students. Rather than offering achievable options, NYS has limited the opportunities for the future of our special education students by creating overly restrictive requirements for a Regents Diploma.

Time is of the essence as graduation requirements will impact our students within the upcoming months. Please consider changes or additions that help our children join post-secondary life with every opportunity to succeed.



Lynda G. Adams, Superintendent of Schools



Monica Manzi, Asst. Superintendent of Special Education



Dawn Covino, President, SEPTA



Lisa Kennedy, Vice President, SEPTA