

The Chinese American Citizens Alliance of Greater N.Y. (CACAGNY)

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Press Statement
April 29, 2020

CACAGNY Demands Accountability in DOE and Grades

Yesterday, New York City's public-school system announced a looser grading policy to cover the spring's shift to remote learning due to the Coronavirus. In summary, the new grade policy consists of the following:

Children in public elementary schools will be marked "Meets Standards" or "Needs Improvement." Middle schoolers in grades six through eight will get those marks, as well as "Course in Progress," which will trigger enrollment in summer programs. High-school students will get grades according to the policies of their schools, but won't get failing marks. Instead, those who haven't kept up will get a "Course in Progress" and be enrolled in summer and fall programs, and seniors will get extra help to graduate in August.

This system throws out accountability in our school system. We are already 2/3rds into the school year and ignoring what students already achieved through March sends the wrong message to kids striving for excellence. There will always be a plethora of stories of hardship, and it's not an issue unique to 2020 or Covid-19. However, those extreme cases pointed out by the Mayor or the Chancellor cannot rob deserving students of all that they have accomplished academically. The ends do not justify the means.

By implementing this lax grading policy with little input from parents, students, and advocates, the DOE and the Chancellor are not only against tests, they are also against the idea of school grades as a measure of accountability. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores have long shown the poor performance of New York City schools, well before this crisis. By eliminating grades, the DOE and Chancellor Carranza want to take advantage of the pandemic to absolve themselves further of their failure to make sure kids are learning during this period and being functionally literate and numerate. This would cause grade fraud to skyrocket by September.

Continuing assessment, which is of particular importance to students of lower income or immigrant families, gives students feedback that is beneficial emotionally and academically. If anything, given the challenges of the pandemic and of remote learning, it is even more important to reassure our students and reinforce their sense of stability, structure and support by continuing to use known standards and routines. It is even more important to assess how the students are performing so that students, parents and teachers can see how to focus on improvements. And this should and can be done without the stress of the fear of any negative grade impact.

CACAGNY supports a "No Harm" grading policy: Keep the grades already earned for earlier work and maintain the existing grading system, but drop the lowest grade for the year, to allow grades to increase but not decrease during the remote learning period. Children should receive their grades up until March, and should get the remote learning grade for their own understanding of their performance and needs, but that remote learning grade should not be included in the calculation of the final grade if it is lower than earlier grades. Students would then not get a lower grade than before remote learning, but only get the same or higher grade. This is positive for everyone.

We urge the Mayor, Speaker Johnson, and Education Chair CM Treyger to fine tune the DOE's ill-conceived policy and change it to a "No Harm" grading policy.

Contact: Phil Wong cacagny.phil.wong@gmail.com



Founded in 1895 in San Francisco, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance is the oldest Chinese American civil rights organization in the United States. CACAGNY is its New York Chapter. www.CACAGNY.org

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