New York State
Disability Services Council

NYS Higher Education Plan 2012-2020
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As the NYSED Office of Higher Education has drafted its 2012-2020 Plan, the NYS Board of Regents has passed an Emergency Action to allow the State Education Department to lower the passing rate on Regents exams for students with disabilities. The plan is to expand the current safety net that allows students with disabilities who score between 45-64 on Regents exams other than English and Math, which still require a passing grade of 55, to earn a local diploma, as long as each grade between 45-54 is balanced by a score on another test of 65 or higher so that the two, when averaged, equals a minimum grade of 55. This is occurring at the same time that SUNY, in the response to college readiness, states that grades of 75 on the English Regents and 80 on the Math Regents are necessary to demonstrate college readiness for degree-credit course work. SUNY is simultaneously proposing a 10-year plan to eliminate remediation citing an annual base cost of $70 million to provide remedial support. Data from the Heath Resource Center at George Washington University indicate that 50% of all students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education are enrolled at public community colleges. Unlike the P-12 system and the SUNY operated campuses, community colleges receive no NYS financial assistance to help defray the cost of educating students with disabilities, and their costs for remedial support are not reflected in the quoted amount.

Impact on Community Colleges: The proposed low-pass rate on one or more Regents exams awards a student with a high school diploma and eligibility for college admissions without the requisite skills to be competitive and complete a program of study. The impact on community colleges cannot be overstated. At a time when all colleges are straining to function with shrinking budgets, even a moderate increase in the number of students requiring the level of assistance required by these local diploma graduates would overwhelm existing resources of the disability offices, Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), tutoring centers, pre-collegiate programs and ESL support services. For example: Erie Community College currently serves approximately 1000 students with disabilities across three campuses. Staffing, space and resources are already strained to meet the needs of current day and evening students. When tutoring is available through the disability department, the tutor is limited to a maximum of 19 hours per week serving 19-30 students per week. One student who was admitted for the fall 2012 semester with an out-of-state diploma had skills similar to those of a NYS local diploma recipient. Results of her placement tests placed her into the college's most basic Reading and Pre-Algebra classes and she requested 2-3 hours per week of tutorial support. That single student would have consumed almost 25% of the total tutoring hours available for those courses. Even with the intensive one-to-one support, she was unable to grasp the information and dropped out by mid-term.

In addition to exhausting existing resources this new population of severely under-prepared students would require the development and implementation of new programs

and services such as academic coaching, life skills and independent living skills. New staff and facilities would be needed to sustain these efforts.

Additionally, a college's ability to award federal financial aid is based, in part, on maintaining a satisfactory default rate on student loans. Students who earn the local diploma are more likely to not complete academic programs, which results in lower earning potential and more likelihood of default on their student loans. This negatively impacts the college's default rate and limits the amount of aid available to other students. Erie Community College has an urban campus which serves many inner city, minority, low income students who already strain the limits of the college's compliance with the default rate. An influx of underprepared students would put the college in serious jeopardy of not being able to maintain the compliance standard.