

II. PROFILE OF THE BOE

The BOE oversees the largest public school system in the country – twice the size of the next largest, the Los Angeles Unified School District. Its student body exceeds 1.1 million. It employs over 63,000 teachers and about 42,000 staff, including social workers, psychologists, administrators, custodians and food service workers. Each year, the BOE budgets about \$9,100 per pupil – about \$2,000 above the national average – for a total of \$9.2 billion (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1997).

In return for its 1997 investment, the BOE awarded diplomas to a total of 32,315 seniors, which represents a four-year graduation rate of 48% (the rate climbs to 70% after seven years). This means that about half of the original freshman cohort either dropped out or lacked the credits to earn a diploma after four years. Of the graduates, most failed to meet the standards of a Regents diploma and instead received either a local diploma or a general education diploma (GED). A snapshot of BOE students' performance in 1996-97 illustrates how students fail to accrue credits toward a Regents diploma (*1996-97 Annual School Reports*, 1998). During the period, only 67% of BOE students passed the Regents English Exam and 38% of BOE students passed the Regents Math I exam, and just 24% of graduating seniors earned Regents diplomas.¹ By contrast, in New York State as a whole, the pass rates for the Regents English and Math I exams were 83% and 67%, respectively, and 42% earned Regents diplomas.²

BOE students' poor Regents performance was mirrored in their performance on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) exam. In 1998, for example, 24,817 BOE students took the SAT – this number represents about 9% of all high school students and 30% of all seniors. Although the test-takers were probably the (self-selected) better students, most earned uncompetitive scores. As Table 1 indicates, on average, BOE students scored only 448 (28th percentile) on verbal and 462 (34th percentile) on math. The problem of weak verbal and math skills is acute at the BOE's lowest-performing high schools. For example, in 1997, students at George Washington High School scored an average 345 (7th percentile) in verbal and 360 (9th percentile) in math (*1996-97 Annual School Reports*, 1998).

To be sure, educating over a million New York City students is a Herculean challenge. BOE students come from about 190 countries. They receive instruction in 11 languages – Arabic, Bengali,

¹ These pass rates pertain only to the population of BOE students who took the Regents English and Regents math exams during the 1996-97 school year. If we expanded the population to the average grade enrollment during the 1996-97 school year, the pass rates would drop to 38.9% on the Regents English exam and 25.0% on the Regents math exam (*1996-97 Annual School Reports*, 1998).

² These pass rates pertain only to the population of students statewide who took the Regents English and Regents math exams during the 1996-97 school year. If we expanded the population to the average grade enrollment during the 1996-97 school year, the pass rates would drop to 56.3% on the Regents English exam and 58.7% on Regents math exam (*1996-97 Annual School Reports*, 1998).

Chinese, French, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese – and are native speakers of many more. Even though the BOE has over 1,100 school locations, it had to squeeze in 60,000 students beyond capacity this school year. More than half of all students are eligible for free lunch, and the BOE serves 606,000 lunches and 140,000 breakfasts each day. (*The 1997 Board of Education of the City of New York Annual Report*, 1998.)

To highlight the diversity of the student population is not to excuse the BOE from finding effective, efficient methods of preparing students for a college education – at CUNY or other institutions. Our study will show that the BOE serves some students quite well and fails to educate others in the most basic skills. Like CUNY, the BOE has done far too little to tailor the traditional school model to its “nontraditional” student body.

The Task Force staff believes that the major causes of BOE’s failure are a lack of standards, an uninformative evaluation system, a shortage of top quality teachers and, exacerbating the problem of weak student performance, a decades-long policy of social promotion. Some recent changes in BOE policy – the creation of system-wide standards and a plan for limiting social promotion – are promising, but they do not go far enough. To accomplish large-scale improvement in students’ performance, and thereby reduce the need for remediation at CUNY, the BOE must take additional steps (see Section XI). In turn, CUNY should set standards of college preparedness, signal the standards to the BOE and improve teacher education.

Table 1. Average SAT I Verbal & Math Scores Generated in 1996-97 Administrations in Percentile Rank, by Selected BOE High Schools

HIGH SCHOOL	VERBAL		MATH	
	Score	Percentile	Score	Percentile
High-Performing Schools^a				
<i>Stuyvesant</i>	681	94	713	96
<i>Bronx Science</i>	610	82	643	86
Staten Island Tech	565	71	602	77
Townsend Harris	607	82	603	77
<i>Brooklyn Tech</i>	555	67	589	75
Midwood	502	47	518	50
Tottenville	475	39	481	40
Low-Performing Schools^b				
<i>Automotive</i>	381	12	375	12
Prospect Heights	366	10	371	10
Samuel Gompers	364	8	391	14
Sarah J. Hale	378	12	387	14
Thomas Jefferson	382	12	391	14
South Bronx	354	7	344	6
Adlai E. Stevenson	406	18	396	16
George Wingate	384	12	385	14
Morris	347	7	356	9
Graphic Arts	419	18	369	8
Park West	395	16	410	18
<i>Bushwick</i>	355	8	370	10
William H. Taft	354	7	377	12
Franklin K. Lane	392	13	416	21
Louis D. Brandeis	361	8	369	10
Theodore Roosevelt	347	7	377	12
Walton	368	10	379	12
John Jay	400	16	397	16
<i>Seward Park</i>	350	7	463	33
<i>George Washington</i>	345	7	360	9
BOE Average	448	28	462	34

Source: SAT scores from *1996-97 School Report Cards* (1998); percentile ranks from The College Board (March 16, 1999)

^a High-performing high schools are those whose students' 1997 SAT scores warranted National Merit recognition. Selective high schools appear in italics.

^b Low-performing high schools are those in the "educational dead zones," the geographic areas encompassing the BOE's worst schools, identified in *Futures Denied: Concentrated Failure in the New York City Public Schools* (Industrial Areas Foundation-Metro NY and Public Education Association, March 1997). Schools under registration review (SURR) by the New York State Education Department (SED) appear in italics.

A. Lack of Standards

For years, the BOE failed to set clear curriculum standards governing the knowledge students require and the process by which they should acquire this knowledge. Regents diploma requirements and frequent standardized testing imposed by the BOE and the SED probably provided some structure. However, without specific reference points, the BOE had no ability to benchmark students' learning or the effectiveness of teachers and administrators.

Until Chancellor Rudy Crew implemented standards this school year, the BOE was literally a "standard-less" learning environment. BOE officials told the Task Force staff that they had no reports

documenting curriculum guidelines or performance expectations by grade level (Gurr, November 16, 1998). One official said that a book of guidelines did exist but that no one could find it (Edwards, October 19, 1998). With the implementation of decentralization in 1970, the BOE ceded the creation of standards to individual community school districts (CSDs) and high school superintendencies, which resulted in disjointed expectations all across the system (Gurr, November 16, 1998). This inconsistency was probably particularly detrimental to the estimated 20% of the student population that transfers from one CSD to another within New York City each school year.

The newly implemented curriculum standards, based on the principle that “all students can learn,” are intended to raise expectations and chart a clear path to a Regents diploma. This “clear path” is urgently needed because the Regents recently raised the minimum requirements for high school graduation. The less demanding local diploma is scheduled to be phased out in 2001, at which point the Regents diploma will be the only diploma New York State offers. To earn a Regents diploma, students will need to pass courses in English, global and United States history, math and science that are more academic in nature and also pass exams in the same subjects.

The BOE expects the new standards and Regents diploma requirements to overwhelm many students, particularly those currently in junior and senior high school. Consequently, the BOE will provide extensive remediation through in-school, extended-day and summer programs (Rodriguez and Gurr, November 4, 1998). If the remedial programs are ineffective, many high school students will fail to earn a Regents diploma and, without the local option, will have to settle for a GED or no diploma at all (Edwards, October 19, 1998). (See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the new graduation requirements and their expected impact on the BOE and CUNY.)

B. Absence of Timely and Accurate Information

Even in the absence of standards, the BOE would be able to gauge students’ acquisition of knowledge through the proper use of testing instruments. However, the BOE does not use testing instruments in a consistent, scientific way and, as a result, does not generate information that is reliable, insightful and strategically useful for improving student performance.

The BOE uses tests inconsistently and erroneously. Over the last seven years, the BOE has not maintained the same menu of testing instruments for more than two consecutive years in English language arts or more than five years in mathematics (BOE Document Scan Center, Test Administration Section, November 13, 1998). With the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, the BOE once again adopted a new menu of citywide tests (memo from Robert Tobias, Executive Director, Division of Assessment and Accountability, BOE, September 29, 1998). It is too early to tell if the move represents improvement.

The BOE uses the Regents Competency Tests (RCTs) as gateway tests to a local high school diploma. The RCTs were designed to assess achievement at the 8th grade level. Thus, the BOE effectively dropped the standard for a diploma to skills that students should master before entering high school – in other words, the BOE is using an 8th grade test to evaluate high school students. The RCTs

should not be used to show anything but minimum competency. We note that, in connection with the new high school graduation requirements, the RCTs will be phased out by spring 2000 (see Appendix A).

The BOE's test-exemption policies are inconsistent and imprecise, further impeding the generation of reliable information. Over the last seven years, with respect to students in kindergarten through 8th grade, the BOE has not maintained the same exemption policies for more than two years in English language arts or more than three years in mathematics (*Citywide Test Results* in reading and math for 1994 through 1998).³ In general, the BOE exempts special education students attending classes in self-contained classrooms and students who are absent on test day, and the BOE can exempt students who have limited English proficiency (LEP). The potential impact of the policies is significant. In 1997, 14% of K-8 students were absent each day (*BOE's Facts and Figures 1996-1997*) and 17% of K-8 students were LEP (*Mayor's Management Report (MMR)*, 1998). Thus, depending on actual attendance figures and how BOE officials interpreted the LEP exemption, three out of every 10 elementary and intermediate school students could have been excused from testing. In sum, under current policy, many students can leave 8th grade without the school system having a clear picture of their basic skills sets.

The BOE does not exploit innovations in measurement technology, such as diagnostic-prescriptive testing, to generate more precise and timely information (Edwards memo, January 7, 1999). For-profit education service providers, such as Kaplan Educational Centers and Sylvan Learning Systems, have been using this technology to create and adjust individualized study plans in their tutoring centers and school partnerships for several years.⁴ By not producing precise and timely information, the BOE forgoes opportunities strategic educational intervention.

This systemwide lack of solid information about student achievement – the result of frequent switching of testing instruments, imprecise exemption policies and failure to adopt innovations – raises questions about whether the BOE is really interested in having hard data available about the effectiveness of New York City's public schools. Through obfuscation, the BOE may be trying to put a good face on a dysfunctional system (Domanico, December 11, 1998).

³ The BOE has no formal policy for exempting students with limited English proficiency from standardized tests in high school. Lillian Hernandez, Director, Office of Bilingual Education, said the BOE has never had a policy of exempting LEP students from taking the RCTs, including the reading and writing tests, or the Regents exams, including the English exam (April 29, 1999). However, Hernandez also said that LEP students "have not been targeted for Regents exams and typically have taken RCTs." Thus, high school LEP students have in fact been held to the lower standard.

As the RCTs are phased out over the next year and new graduation requirements are phased in, high school LEP students will have to take and pass five Regents exams, including the English exam, in order to earn a diploma. See Appendix A, "Changes in High School Graduation Requirements."

⁴ For information on for-profit and not-for-profit education service providers, see *Analysis of Remedial Education Outsourcing Alternatives*.

C. **Shortage of Top Quality Teachers**

The BOE does not employ enough top-quality teachers who possess the pedagogical skills and core expertise to teach essential knowledge to students. Extensive research shows that teachers who attended better colleges or scored higher on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, ACT or certification exams) are more successful at helping their students achieve (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). A study led by a Queens College education professor found that teacher qualities, including experience and knowledge, accounted for about 90% of the variance in reading and math achievement among BOE students, when controlled for socio-economic characteristics (Armour-Thomas, 1990).

By many measures, BOE teachers are of poor quality. First, 20% of all BOE teachers function without a license (*1996-1997 Annual School Reports*, November 1997). Second, teachers with better credentials will often avoid BOE jobs and pursue more attractive positions in the suburbs (*Teaching to Higher Standards: New York's Commitment*, SED, June 12, 1998). Third, a large portion of the BOE's workforce – the press reports 80% and the BOE reports 27%⁵ – comes from CUNY teacher preparation programs, which some recent SED tests would rank as among the worst in the state.⁶

The problem of poor teacher quality is acute at the BOE's worst high schools, which are those under registration review by the SED (SURR). SURR schools are more likely to employ unlicensed teachers (*1996-97 Annual School Reports*, 1998) and graduates of CUNY's education programs (Division of Human Resources, BOE, November 23, 1998). For example, one out of every five teachers at George Washington and John Jay high schools is a CUNY graduate. In contrast, only one in 10 teachers at Stuyvesant, Bronx Science or Benjamin Cardozo high schools – some of the best high schools in the city (*Futures Denied: Concentrated Failure in the New York City Public Schools*, March 1997) is a CUNY grad.

Over the next five years, as Table 2 indicates, the BOE projects needing to hire over 40,000 new teachers – amounting to nearly two thirds of the currently teaching force – across all subjects and special education disciplines, mostly as a result of program expansion and retirements. Those who will retire are the most experienced teachers and holdovers from the days when teaching was one of few professions open to well-educated women. Unless the BOE begins hiring licensed, experienced, knowledgeable teachers, the cycle of systematic dysfunction will continue unbroken.

⁵ See footnote **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

⁶ Beginning in November 2000, the New York State Board of Regents is planning to deregister teacher education programs whose graduates do not pass each part of the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations at a rate of 80%. There has been widespread speculation that CUNY's teacher education programs are likely to be deregistered. See *Beyond Graduation Rates*.

Table 2. Five-Year Projection of Need for BOE Teachers, by Subject

SUBJECT AREA	SCHOOL YEAR				
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
Common Branches	2250	2150	2280	2370	2275
Bilingual Common Branches	350	375	395	405	380
Early Childhood *	230	410	380	375	375
Bilingual Early Childhood *	125	125	140	130	135
Special Education	620	625	615	605	585
Bilingual Special Education	105	120	125	135	145
Speech Improvement	140	165	135	130	160
Bilingual Speech	75	120	140	145	135
Social Studies	490	490	510	520	530
English	470	490	510	530	530
Mathematics	420	440	460	420	440
Science	500	520	545	545	525
Bilingual Secondary	135	155	165	175	180
ESL (Elem. & Sec.)	275	290	300	310	305
Foreign Languages	240	290	295	245	265
Health & Physical Education	155	175	180	175	190
Reading	90	125	125	125	125
Art	135	125	125	100	100
Music	135	125	125	90	90
Business Education	50	50	45	45	40
Technology	100	125	125	125	125
Sub-Total	7090	7395	7730	7700	7635
Cumulative Total	7090	14,485	22,215	29,915	37,550

Source: Division of Human Resources, BOE (November 20, 1998)

* Does not reflect an additional 9,600 teachers needed for Universal Pre-K and Early Class Size Reduction over the next four years.

D. Social Promotion

By promoting students from grade to grade without determining that they are prepared, the BOE fails to ensure that students are acquiring knowledge on schedule. If socially promoted students do not catch up over time, they have a good chance of graduating without the skills necessary for post-secondary education.

Formal policy says that students “may be held over only once in any grade and may not be held over more than twice prior to entry into high school” and that students “will articulate to the 9th grade if they will reach age 15 by December 31 of the next school year” (*Regulation of the Chancellor A-501*, June 2, 1994). A snapshot of the BOE in 1997 illustrates the far-reaching impact of social promotion. That year, 96% of all elementary and middle school students were promoted, even though 53% were below grade level in reading and 40% were below grade level in math. The 48% four-year high school graduation rate indicates that social promotion severely cripples many students by high

school. Even with up to three extra years of instruction, only another 22% are ultimately able to graduate.

Chancellor Crew has stated his intention to phase out social promotion starting in the spring of the 1999-2000 school year.⁷ Crew proposes that 4th-12th graders who score below the 35th percentile on a standardized reading test should be assigned to summer school. Unless the students bring their skills up to grade level, Crew proposed that they should be held back the following school year (Katz, May 9, 1999). Officials estimate that 300,000 students could perform below the cut score and may need to attend summer school (Gendar and Wasserman, May 5, 1999). We have stated earlier that the new curriculum standards and Regents diploma requirements will overwhelm the BOE's safety net programs – e.g., in-school, extended-day and summer school remediation. The ending of social promotion will only compound the effect. The BOE urgently needs to create capacity to deal with a dramatic increase in academic need for remediation at all levels.

E. Who Chooses CUNY?

Many BOE students see CUNY as their primary college option. According to a BOE survey asking 1997 graduates about their post-high school plans, 42% of respondents said they plan to attend CUNY colleges, 14% planned to attend SUNY colleges, 20% planned to attend other public and

⁷ Crew first announced his intention to phase out social promotion in April 1998 (Steinberg, April 21, 1998; Kershaw, April 22, 1998; Associated Press, April 21, 1998) and re-affirmed his intention recently (Gendar and Wasserman, May 5, 1999).

The BOE tried to end social promotion once before, in 1981 (Steinberg, April 26, 1998). Chancellor Frank Macchiarola instituted the so-called "gates program," under which 4th graders reading a year below and 7th graders reading 18 months below grade level were compelled to attend summer school. Summer school students received intensive instruction and were re-tested in August. If they performed at grade level, they moved on; if not, they were held back. Held-back students were assigned to classes with a maximum of 20 students and given opportunities for after-school tutoring.

Early results were encouraging. In spring 1982, 6,200 4th graders scored below grade level. At the end of the summer 1,700 (or 27%) avoided flunking and 4,500 repeated the grade. Of the latter group, 3,200 met the cut score by the following January or April and were mainstreamed. Thus, of all students not reading at grade level at the end of 4th grade, 79% caught up within 18 months.

However, in a 1987 follow-up study, Chancellor Nathan Quinones found that students remediated through the gates program could not sustain their progress. Forty-four percent of students who were held back in 4th grade were held back a second time in 7th grade, compared with 24% of their classmates. In addition, 41% of students held back in 7th grade dropped out by 1987, compared with 25% of their classmates.

In 1991, Quinones's successor, Joseph Fernandez, canceled the gates program, saying that flunking students eroded their self esteem. He replaced the program with "Promoting Success," which placed students who scored below the 15th percentile in remedial programs during and after school; special attention was paid to 4th graders. Fifty-seven thousand students scored low enough to qualify in 1990-91, and 54,000 scored low enough to qualify in 1991-92. Of these students, only about a quarter had made sufficient progress by the end of the school year to advance out of remediation. Fernandez's contract was not renewed in early 1993; Fernandez's successor, Ramon Cortines, left in 1995, just after he had formed a task force to end social promotion. Prior to Chancellor Crew's implementation of new curriculum standards in fall 1998, formation of the Task Force was the BOE's most recent step toward ensuring that students graduated with adequate skills.

private colleges in state, 12% planned to attend colleges out of state, and the remaining 13% planned to attend technical schools or seek employment (Office of Data Analysis of the Office of School Programs and Support Services, BOE, September 14, 1998). About 35% of all 1997 BOE graduates who actually enrolled at CUNY in 1997 – but not the BOE’s brightest and best. Table 3 lists high- and low-performing high schools and indicates how many of their total number of 1997 graduates went on to CUNY. The high-performing schools sent relatively few students to CUNY: selective high schools sent between 5.6% and 19.8%, and other top schools sent 13.3% to 35.5%. In contrast, the low-performing schools sent a much larger proportion: SURR schools sent between 16.3% and 52.7%, and other low-performing schools sent between 28.0% and 51.6%.

Table 3. Percent of 1997 BOE High School Graduates who Enrolled at CUNY in Fall and Spring 1997, by High- and Low-Performing Schools

HIGH SCHOOL	TOTAL 1997 GRADUATES	# ENROLLED AT CUNY	% ENROLLED AT CUNY
High-Performing Schools^a			
<i>Stuyvesant</i>	666	37	5.6
<i>Bronx Science</i>	660	45	6.8
Staten Island Tech	180	24	13.3
Townsend Harris	248	39	15.7
<i>Brooklyn Tech</i>	931	184	19.8
Benjamin Cardozo	793	185	23.3
Midwood	629	195	31.0
Tottenville	640	226	35.5
Low-Performing Schools^b			
<i>Automotive</i>	98	16	16.3
Prospect Heights	250	70	28.0
Samuel Gompers	71	20	28.2
Sarah J. Hale	140	40	28.6
Thomas Jefferson	118	39	33.1
South Bronx	87	29	33.3
Adlai E. Stevenson	307	106	34.5
George Wingate	286	100	35.0
Morris	110	40	36.4
Graphic Arts	125	46	36.8
Park West	172	64	37.2
<i>Bushwick</i>	230	89	38.7
<i>William H. Taft</i>	294	117	39.8
Franklin K. Lane	378	158	41.8
Louis D. Brandeis	268	112	41.8
Theodore Roosevelt	293	123	42.0
Walton	206	87	42.2
John Jay	247	107	43.3
<i>Seward Park</i>	298	152	51.0
<i>George Washington</i>	304	157	51.6
<i>Harry Van Arsdale</i>	131	69	52.7

Source: CUNY enrollment data from CUNY (August 1998)

^a High-performing high schools are those whose students’ 1997 SAT scores warranted National Merit recognition. Selective high schools appear in italics.

^b Low-performing high schools are those in the “educational dead zone,” the geographic area encompassing the BOE’s worst schools, identified in *Futures Denied: Concentrated Failure in the New York City Public Schools* (Industrial Areas Foundation-Metro NY and Public Education Association, March 1997). Schools under registration review (SURR) by the New York State Education Department (SED) appear in italics.

F. Conclusion

The BOE's effectiveness is compromised by the absence of comprehensive curriculum standards, a shortage of excellent teachers, an evaluation program that fails to measure student progress, and a formal policy of social promotion. With this information and these insights, we crafted our original research into the relationship between the BOE and CUNY.