Dear New York State Legislator:

As a parent with a child(ren) in the public school district of Blind Brook - Rye, Westchester County, NY, I would like to join the growing ranks of concerned parents in expressing my reservations about the new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) legislation.

New York State has implemented dramatic changes to our public school system over the past year. As parents, we appreciate that change is a necessary component of maintaining a productive, successful academic environment for our children. However, we are very concerned that some of these changes are being hurriedly implemented without a pilot program or proper input, support, and review by professionals in the field.

Our concerns include the following:

1) Increased testing under APPR legislation negatively impacts the classroom experience.

America's public schools currently administer more than 100 million standardized exams each year, including IQ, achievement, screening, and readiness tests. The need for student achievement measures in every class for APPR means an increase in testing for our children. Preparing for and administering these tests takes valuable time away from classroom instruction.

Increased standardized testing can result in a classroom atmosphere of constant test preparation and test taking. The love of learning takes a back seat to improving test scores as the overriding concern. Testing linked to the performance evaluations of our teachers and administrators further increases the focus on test preparation and drills, with less time given for creative and collaborative problem solving.

Given the APPR's emphasis on test scores, there is the risk that schools will begin to limit the level of classes offered to students or to plan their class placements based on potential testing abilities. For example, teachers may not wish to have students in their classrooms that don't test well, such as those with learning or emotional disabilities, those learning English, or those that are gifted and start out at a higher testing level, with limited space for improvement over the year.

2) The reliability of the "value-added" model of teacher evaluation is unproven.

The "value-added" model of teacher effectiveness, which compares test scores at the beginning and end of the school year, has not been found to be a reliable evaluation system. The outcome is easily affected by factors such as the quality of the test and the statistical model used. Outside influences not under the teacher's control, such as students' attendance, home life and peer groups, can account for 85-90% of the variation in scores.

Testing of non-academic subjects such as music, art and physical education is also problematic under the current program.

New York is implementing APPR in a short time period without the proper input in development and the subsequent review a system of this magnitude should have. A more reasonable approach, which is being implemented in Connecticut, would have been to introduce APPR as a pilot in several districts, then assess and incorporate feedback from parents, administrators and teachers before rolling out a broader statewide program.

3) The privacy of our children is at risk.

There will be a tremendous amount of data on teachers and students generated by APPR. This will include transcripts, attendance and grades, as well as socio-economic data and special education status. This extremely sensitive data will be managed and stored by the private sector in databases outside the control of local districts.

4) APPR as it stands now represents a cost that school districts can ill afford.

Forced to implement APPR or risk a loss of state funding, school districts have put their systems in place without sufficient financial assistance, further burdening budgets that have already been cut to bare bones. Under this new law, school districts are responsible for a number of costs, including administrative and professional training, purchasing and copying of standardized tests, correction and grading of these tests, storage of student and teacher data, and accelerated computer network upgrades to support testing. This is in addition to the costs in both time and resources that each district expends to develop the mandated local assessment portion of APPR.

Looking at first-year costs for 18 districts in the Lower Hudson Valley, the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at SUNY New Paltz estimates that, "An average of 3% of a district's budget will be taken up by expenses related to APPR." This is before any other budgetary items are added to the mix.

Increased standardized testing thus results in our tax dollars being redirected from our schools to private testing companies, consultants, and outside vendors. We resent our district funds being funneled to these private companies at a fiscally challenging time for our schools.

We are proud of our New York public school system and welcome accountability of the members of the educational team. We feel strongly that our children deserve an evaluation system that accomplishes what it sets out to do. However, APPR is an unproven system that has not received the proper input in development and subsequent review that an initiative of this magnitude should have. We have no assurance that APPR will be able to achieve the goals of an accurate, reliable and fiscally responsible evaluation system that will improve the academic, social and emotional growth of our students. We therefore request the following:

- **That NY State commit to reimbursing schools for test-related expenses**, as the costs associated with the implementation of APPR far exceed the state and federal funding our districts will receive for their compliance.
- **A thorough, independent year-end review of APPR and its impact on our schools, including a cost analysis.** This review should be statewide and include the input of parents, administrators and teachers.
- **That parents be made aware of the risks of the transference and storage of personal student data to private companies and be given the option to opt out** of sharing that data on behalf of their child(ren), if they feel the risks are too high.

In conclusion, we fear that the costs associated with APPR in its current state – financial and otherwise – are too high. In its rush to implement a strong professional evaluation program, New York State has created additional problems instead of providing a workable solution.

Sincerely,
(Your Name)