



THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JOEL I. KLEIN, *Chancellor*

OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

52 Chambers Street – New York, NY 10007

A Letter to Parents from Chancellor Joel I. Klein

June 1, 2006

Dear Parents:



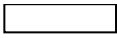
I write to tell you about important steps we are taking to make your school, the Department of Education, and me directly accountable to you for how much your child learns every year.

Well-informed parents are a powerful force for making schools better. When parents know their kids aren't learning as much as they can, they demand improvement in their schools or look for better ones. As a parent, you want to know: "How well is my child learning? How can she improve? What is the school doing to *help* her improve? How can I follow her progress? How can I help?" My new plan provides five answers to these questions that we can use together to improve the learning of every child.

- Each summer, you will receive a Progress Report grading your school (A-F) on attendance, safety, what parents, students, and teachers tell us on surveys, how well students read, write, and do math, and how much each child at the school improves, on average, during the year. Schools won't be penalized for how well students perform when they first arrive. Schools will be graded on how much progress they help all children make—including English Language Learners, special needs students, students struggling at the start of the year, and gifted and talented students. We will help schools work to improve, but we won't accept repeated failure. Schools that perform poorly and don't improve will get new principals or be closed. Schools that outperform similar schools will be rewarded.
- Once a year, parents will receive a written report based on a careful "quality review" of their school by experienced educators. Reviewers will observe classrooms, talk to parents, students, and staff, and rate each school on how well it knows the strengths and weaknesses of each child, builds a "battle plan" to improve each child's learning, and changes that plan at the first sign it isn't working.
- At least once a grading period, schools will measure each child's progress on the skills kids need to be good readers and writers and to do well at math. The example on the next page shows how we can use these assessments to follow the progress of three fifth graders on reading skills between October and December. These tell parents and teachers whether a child is moving from not understanding (white), to starting to understand (light gray), to mastering each important skill (dark gray). The measures show whether a child needs a better "battle plan" because her skills are not improving or needs to be challenged more because she is doing well on everything she is being taught. And they show the skills a teacher is good at teaching and the skills he has to work harder to explain. These are not "high stakes" tests. They are aids to parents and teachers. Schools can choose their own assessments, as long as they are able to show progress.

October 2006	Jessica Holloway	Edward Smith	Raul Fuentes
Summarizing			
Main Idea			
Fact vs. Opinion			
Predicting			
Context Clues			
Paraphrasing			

December 2006	Jessica Holloway	Edward Smith	Raul Fuentes
Summarizing			
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Understands		Some Understanding		Does Not Understand	
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- An information system will let teachers and principals and then parents follow each student’s progress from kindergarten through high school and compare schools to be sure all children are improving, whatever their race, nationality, special needs, or gifts and talents.
- Principals and teachers will receive extensive training in using these tools.

This plan goes into effect in at least 200 schools this fall, and citywide in 2007-2008.

Recently, I read a powerful study called “Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds . . . and Others Don’t.” It describes a key trait of high-performing schools, which I think applies to all schools and all children—not just “Schools with Latino Children”:

Forget what you’ve heard about . . . schools hating [tests] and resisting accountability. The beat-the-odds schools provide riveting evidence that principals and teachers in successful schools embrace regular assessments as a way of identifying problems sooner and understanding them much more clearly. . . Principals and teachers are collecting and poring over. . . measurements. They are doing it over and over, often every week or every month, to make sure they catch problems as they arise [and] look individually at each classroom, each teacher, and, most importantly, each student. [V]isibility is the first step to ensuring that no struggling student and no struggling teacher is left behind.

This is the essence of my new plan: giving principals, teachers, and parents the information they need to demand, follow, and achieve progress in student learning—with full accountability *to parents* and no excuses for failure.

If you have questions or comments, contact me at Joel I. Klein, 52 Chambers St., NY, NY 10007 or write to childrenfirst@nycboe.net

Sincerely,



Joel I. Klein
Chancellor