

Official Publication of the Yonkers Federation of Teachers

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The Manufactured Failure of Public Education

By Dan Florin

I have often said to my fellow teachers that public schools are victims of manufactured failure. To begin with, our public schools are woefully and intentionally underfunded. In 2006, the state's highest court ruled in favor of a lawsuit brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. The Courts affirmed that the State had failed to adequately fund public schools. It was determined that students of New York's public schools, based on the funding formula, were not (and are not) being provided a sound, basic education. Yonkers is a city that suffers from this inequitable distribution of funding. Yet despite the court's rulings, no lasting financial resources have been brought to bear to remedy the inequity. This inequity, legally speaking, exists today and continues to cheat our students and community.

Compounding this fiscal inequity, in 2011, under Governor Cuomo's leadership, a tax cap was instituted that limits the ability of communities from procuring funds that could be used for public education. Fewer dollars means fewer programs and human resources – i.e. full day PreK, music, library, pupil support services. Cuomo provided a carrot in the form of a monetary kickback to voters if their community stayed within the tax cap. The result is that all public schools have had to do more with less. Families who want the best for their children leave communities where public education is withering thereby affecting home values and the capacity to secure new tax revenue.

In 2012, Commissioner King and the Board of Regents modified the scoring bands for the New York State Assessments creating student failure where just the prior year there was proficiency. These "cut-scores" were the first salvo in the manufacturing of so-called failure of the public schools. The cut-scores were soon to be followed by the implementation and rigor of the Common Core Learning Standards and testing. Although educators complained vociferously that the Common Core roll out was poorly thought out and rushed (no resources, no training), Commissioner King tried to assuage concerns by publicly stating that NYSED's expectation was that student scores would drop 30% and not to be alarmed. No foul or blame. As the blanket of failure was lowered upon school districts, those with disproportionate poverty, high ratio of ELL and special need students, and inconsistent funding, like Yonkers, suffered most.

In 2013, Governor Cuomo forced a deadline on school districts, like Yonkers, to negotiate an APPR evaluation plan. Under the penalty of financial duress, districts and unions desperately rushed to agree upon a formula that required state tests to comprise 20% of a teacher's evaluation with another 20% from a local assessment. NYSED reviewed the plans, sending some back to districts to meet their criteria, before accepting them as viable evaluation tools. Cuomo then supported legislation allowing for a 2 year moratorium whereby no disciplinary action would be taken against teachers whose students test scores resulted in an ineffective rating.

In fall of 2014, Cuomo reversed himself on the testing moratorium and vetoed his own legislation opening the door for teacher terminations with two years of ineffective rating. However, test score results from those same tests cannot be used to influence student promotion.

(Continued back page)

RICHARD GAZZOLA TEACHER CENTER NEWS

Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, Director



Lia Council, Policy Board Chair

One Larkin Center

Yonkers, NY 10701

Phone 376-8614 FAX 376-3427

www.rgteachercenter.org

WE NEED MONEY! HELP!

Teacher Centers are funded through a New York State Grant. The governor has not included teacher centers in his budget. You can help by urging legislators to support teacher center funding. Go to www.NYSUT.org, log onto the NYSUT MAC, look for teacher centers, click on it, add your name and address, then press send. It's that easy.

In addition, please consider emailing or calling your local legislators and tell them:

- Teacher Centers collaborate with all stakeholders to offer courses that support district and state initiatives
- Teacher Centers provide support to new and seasoned teachers, aimed at improving and enhancing teaching and student learning through mentoring
- Our Teacher Center offers learning opportunities that are after school and free to teachers and at no cost to school districts
- At the direction of the NYS Education Department, Teacher Centers focus on 3 major areas: implementation of the common core learning standards, using data to inform instruction, and developing highly effective teachers
- Teacher Center offerings are critical to the professional development required of teachers for the teacher evaluation system and certification
- Teacher Centers assist with career advancement through educational and teacher leadership programs
- Teacher Centers provide valuable resources such as lending libraries including student and professional books, laminating machines, Ellison die cuts, and book binding

Please send a message to Albany to restore funding to Teacher Centers!

RESOURCES

Yonkers Public Library: The Yonkers Public Library offers a variety of resources for teachers, students and community members for free. They include free homework help, technology courses, La Leche League meetings, story time for children, book clubs for adults, open mic for teenagers, and free music downloads. Go to www.ypl.org for more information.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING

The Defensive Driving Class was a success. As a result, the Richard Gazzola Teacher Center, in collaboration with the National Safety Council (6) hour program, will offer Defensive Driving for all Yonkers teachers, teaching assistants and their family members.

Registration will be handled on a first-come, first-serve basis, with a maximum of 30 in a class. The cost of the program is **\$25 per person**. We must have the check before the course start date.

Benefits of the Program:

- *10% discount on personal injury, bodily injury &
- *property damage, liability coverage and collision.
- *Discounts for 3 years
- *Removal of up to 4 points

CHECK MADE TO: Bill Troy, Instructor

MAIL CHECK TO: Richard Gazzola Teacher Center
One Larkin Center
Yonkers, NY 10701

DEFENSIVE DRIVING

DATE: Saturday, May 16, 2015
TIME: 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
LOCATION: Grinton Will Library
1500 Central Park Ave
Yonkers, NY 10710

Name: _____

Address: _____ **School:** _____

HomePhone: _____ **CellPhone:** _____

Name(s) of family members – (must be licensed drivers)

Name: _____

Check#: _____ **Date** _____

Name: _____

Check#: _____ **Date** _____

Samantha Rosado-Ciriello, Director



Teachers Teaching Teachers

TENURE: Educators' Rights VS. Political Ploys

By John Eshoo

Tenure was enacted in New York State in 1897 to **safeguard teachers from unfair firing and political pressure**. The first tenure statute applied only to N.Y.C. teachers. Eventually tenure was amended to apply to all public school teachers. What foresight the early law makers had over 115 years ago. Today's teachers know well the unfairness and political and administrative pressures that exist. Tenure laws simply give teachers, who are granted tenure, **the fundamental right to due process which all Americans have as a Constitutional right**. This due process involves these rights: to know the charges against you; to have legal counsel; and to have a fair hearing on the charges with an arbitrator. Tenure, which protects good teachers from firing for arbitrary reasons, allows them to speak out freely on educational issues like the over use of standardized tests, program cuts and the **insufficient and disproportionate State funding to school districts**.

Layoffs in Yonkers occurred twice recently from the early to the later years between 2000-2010, greatly reducing the number of classroom and pupil support teachers. We went from over 2,200 teachers in the early years to currently 1,800 teachers, all while the student population was growing. A large number of our students are classified at poverty levels and many are non-English speaking. This problem is not unique to Yonkers and needs to be addressed by the Governor and the State Legislators. They must stop under funding education. Bud Kroll, a retired Wall Streeter and board member of Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE) said in the Journal News: **"Poverty has everything to do with student readiness. It is the one thing that explains so much."**

Governor Andrew Cuomo in his State of The State address on January 21, 2015 clearly put the blame on teachers for the problems in education. Governor Cuomo called for teacher evaluations to determine who gets tenure, who may be fired, and who is eligible for bonus pay. He is also calling to raise the cap on the number of charter schools which he says will break the public school monopoly. Or does he mean public school unions? Remember that currently in the courts there is one of two lawsuits against tenure brought by a group called the "Partnership for Educational Justice" which has ties to the charter school movement. Governor Cuomo has not revealed any details about State aid to school districts because he plans to make the amount of aid he supports contingent on the Legislature approving his so called reform.

Seniority, like tenure, is a fundamental employment right. If the courts rule against tenure what happens to your due process rights? Will layoffs, if they occur, be conducted fairly and objectively? Seniority guards against abuses by those who would use 'layoffs' as another way to fire teachers who are at the top of their pay or who advocate for the rights of students or even for their contractual rights.

Most people think tenure is automatic upon being hired. Set the record straight and tell them it took three years of probation, being observed and evaluated as well as taking certification tests, meeting professional requirements and obtaining a Master's degree all during the period of time when a teacher could be fired without any real recourse. Remember, tenure is granted to a teacher upon successful completion of the probationary period by the Board of Education as recommended by the building administrator and the Superintendent.

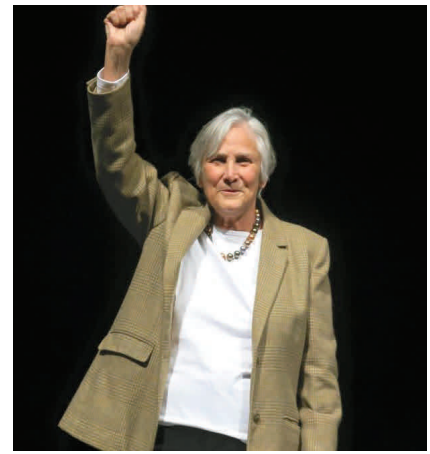
Governor Cuomo in an interview on New Year's Eve said, "It takes years to fire a bad teacher." Campbell Brown, the head of the pro-charter group supporting the suit against tenure said; "It takes 800 days to fire a bad teacher." These comments reflect their position on tenure. As so-called educational advocates, I am sure they both should know that the amendment to the tenure law in 2012 expedited the process so that the maximum time for the entire process is now 5 months. Is the removal of tenure one of Governor Cuomo's reforms that he wants in order to move on the school aid that local school districts need to know in building their own budgets? **He recently said he will support an overall 4.8 increase in school aid if the state Legislature passes his long list of educational "reforms"**, which would take your rights away.

Again, I urge all teachers – in-service & retirees – to get actively involved through e-mails, faxes, and text alerts from NYSUT & the YFT to fight the attacks on public education and teacher unions. We need **all teachers** to donate or increase their donation when the YFT Vote Cope campaign starts in order to compete against the hedge fund millionaires who have given millions to Governor Cuomo and many state politicians in the last election in an attempt to push their agenda for charter schools and anti-union bias.

YFT HAPPENINGS



NYSUT President Karen McGee addresses a crowd of over 200 people (and a cardboard cutout of Governor Cuomo) at SUNY Purchase on March 12th.



Keynote speaker and educational expert Diane Ravitch received a standing ovation for her inspirational words on topics such as the failed implementation of Common Core and the unfair over-reliance on testing.



Our own Pat Puleo addresses the crowd to welcome our elected officials to the forum.

The SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) team from School 13 had the privilege of presenting this year at the 2015 NYSABE (New York State Bilingual Education Conference). The SIOP team consists of monolingual, transitional bilingual and special education teachers: Christine Heidelberger, Loshani Miele, Rita Ramirez, Patricia Soropoulos and Angela Sassone. We demonstrated five strategies that we use in the classroom to meet the needs of all our students, especially our ELLs (English Language Learners). We are grateful to Dr. Michael Yazurlo, Tiara Reyes-Vega, Isabel Hernandez and Steve Lopez for their support and for making it possible for us to attend and present at this prestigious conference. We would also like to thank the SIOP consultant, Ann Hengerer, for her guidance throughout this endeavor.



World Autism Awareness Day is April 2nd. Last year, tens of thousands of people from 136 countries -- including all 7 continents and the International Space Station -- joined in shining a (blue) light on Autism. We're hoping to make this year even bigger!

Thanks to one of our YFT members, Kerriann Longo Chirico, the YFT will be putting together a team for this year's walk for **Autism Speaks** in June. You can visit <http://www.walknowforautismspeaks.org/faf/search/searchTeamPart.asp?ievent=1125399&team=6313100> to view team information. If you are interested in helping the team, participate in the walk or would like to assist by making a financial contribution, please contact the YFT at yft860@bestweb.net.



APRIL CALENDAR



8th	3:45pm	Executive Board	YFT
13th	7:00pm	YCPTA	Cedar Place
16th	3:45pm	Building Assembly	Roosevelt
22nd	7:00pm	BOE Stated Meeting	Saunders
22nd	3:45pm	Executive Board	YFT
23rd	6:30pm	YCPTA Scholarship Fundraiser Dinner	TBA
29th-May 1st		NYSUT Regional Assembly	Buffalo

On Tuesday March 3rd, an evening with a wintry mix of weather, The Irish Consulate of New York hosted it's St. Patrick's Day Reception on Park Avenue between 51st Street and 52nd Street in Manhattan. General Consul, Barbara Jones, welcomed her invited guests and expressed her gratitude to educators in New York, as well as Irish and Irish Americans in the NY community.

Barbara Jones was born in County Wexford, Ireland. She is a graduate of Arts (in French and History) from University College, Dublin and a post graduate with qualifications in Education and Computer Sciences. She became Consul in 2014.



Consul Jones spoke with **Erin Gorman** and **Linda Morley**, invited teachers from the **Yonkers Public Schools' Pearls Hawthorne Elementary School** about challenges for teachers in NY with students of varied abilities, from multiethnic backgrounds in schools with reduced services, and growing class sizes. Ms. Morley's invited guest, **Rosemary Harnett** is currently a fourth grade special education teacher representing a Bronx Elementary School. The ladies met the Deputy Head of Mission, Anna McGillicuddy. **Kevin Gorman**, retired Federal Government Employee, father and guest of Erin, also mingled with other guests such as Raymond Kelly, prior U.S. Custom's Service Commissioner and New York Police Department Commissioner. New York UFT and NYSUT members, other local Union representatives and many friends and supporters of the Consulate networked and welcomed the busy month of March, 2015 for Irish and Irish Americans.

Erin and Linda would like to give a special thanks to a **Yonkers' Parent, Claire Cunnane** for including them in this special event as representatives of the Educational Community in the New York Area.

The Irish Consulate of New York's website states,

"The Consulate promotes and protects Irish interests through its work with the Irish community in the region, promoting Irish economic interest, supporting the strong partnership between the US and Ireland, and providing a range of key consular services."

Come celebrate the arts in
your community!

Volunteer at
Yonkers Arts Weekend!

If interested, call Pam at (914) 375-2151 or
email pamela@groundworkhv.org



GROUNDWORK
Hudson Valley

What volunteers get...

◇FREE T-shirt, snacks, and more!

◇Chance to work with national and international artists

◇Community service hours

What to expect at this year's Yonkers Arts

Weekend (YAW) Festival...

More than 150 local, regional, and international artists, painters, photographers, filmmakers, and musicians will converge on Yonkers to showcase their work at Yonkers Arts Weekend, one of the largest arts festivals in Westchester County. Arts venues throughout the Downtown Waterfront District as well as Untermeyer Gardens, YoHo Artist Studios, the Hudson River Museum, and Sarah Lawrence College will be running continuously throughout the weekend. **Groundwork Hudson Valley will sponsor this year's festival, which runs from May 1 to May 3.**

Educational Issues

At Issue

Information, Policies and Updates that Shape our Profession

21st Century Skills is a term evocative of whole new realms of learning, working and even living, made possible through rapid advances in technology. It can also be used as a cliché, bandied about by people who aren't sure how else to refer to these new developments.

This month's *At Issue* is an overview and analysis of what specifically constitute 21st Century Skills and how these understandings can promote reflective practice in our teaching.

At Issue...What are 21st Century Skills?

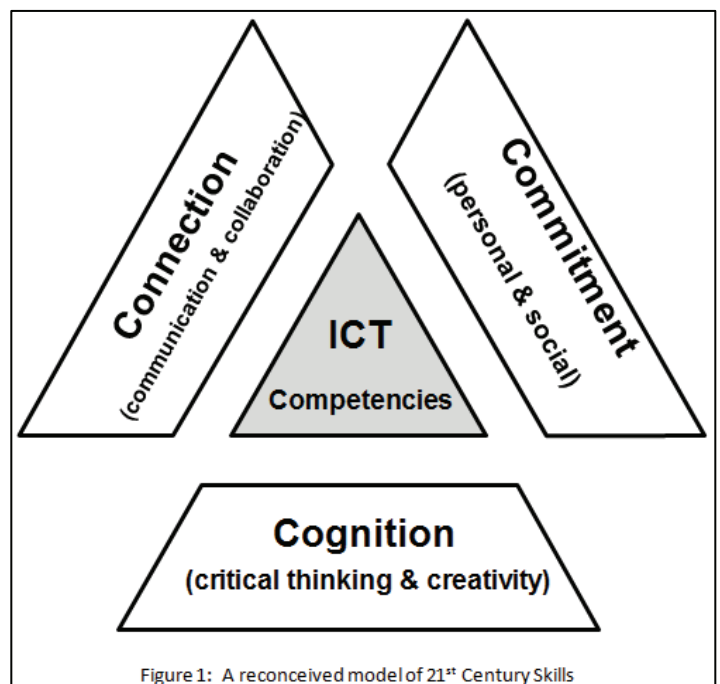
Most likely intended to be very forward-sounding at the beginning of the 2000s, the term 21st Century Skills can also be the source of confusion. It has nonetheless had a significant influence in such areas as technology integration or the design of the Common Core standards.

Despite the reliance on the term "21st Century Skills," there are actually several frequently cited frameworks of these skills with no single authoritative definition. When all these models are combined there are well over 50 attributes and skills in total. Given the complexity of all these conceptual models, some organizations such as the National Educational Association (NEA) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) have attempted to distill it down to the "4 Cs of 21st Century Skills": Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving. The obvious problem with that is that there is no explicit mention of technology in any of those Cs, thus bringing us back to square one.

At Issue...How can we synthesize these 21st skills into one concise and usable model?

In order to help our members conceptualize what is meant by 21st Century Skills, most of the terms used in the various frameworks have been compiled and then re-organized into a simplified form. We are suggesting that essentially there are three elements -- *connection*, *commitment* and *cognition* -- surrounding the central theme of *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competencies*. (Figure 1)

In this framework, *connection* includes communication and collaboration with the rationale that these represent various forms of interpersonal interaction. This model also introduces the term *commitment* to cover the so-called non-cognitive, "soft" skills or character education traits. Finally, the broad designation *cognition* includes all thought processes from critical thinking and problem-solving to creativity.



When we focus on just these three elements, we see that these could have easily been part of a 20th Century skills framework, which is actually timeless. The difference, and the challenge for 21st Century teaching, is to clarify the role of the center triangle labeled *ICT Competencies*. Figure 2 shows how these categories can be further broken down and includes examples of the specific terminology used in those five analyzed frameworks.

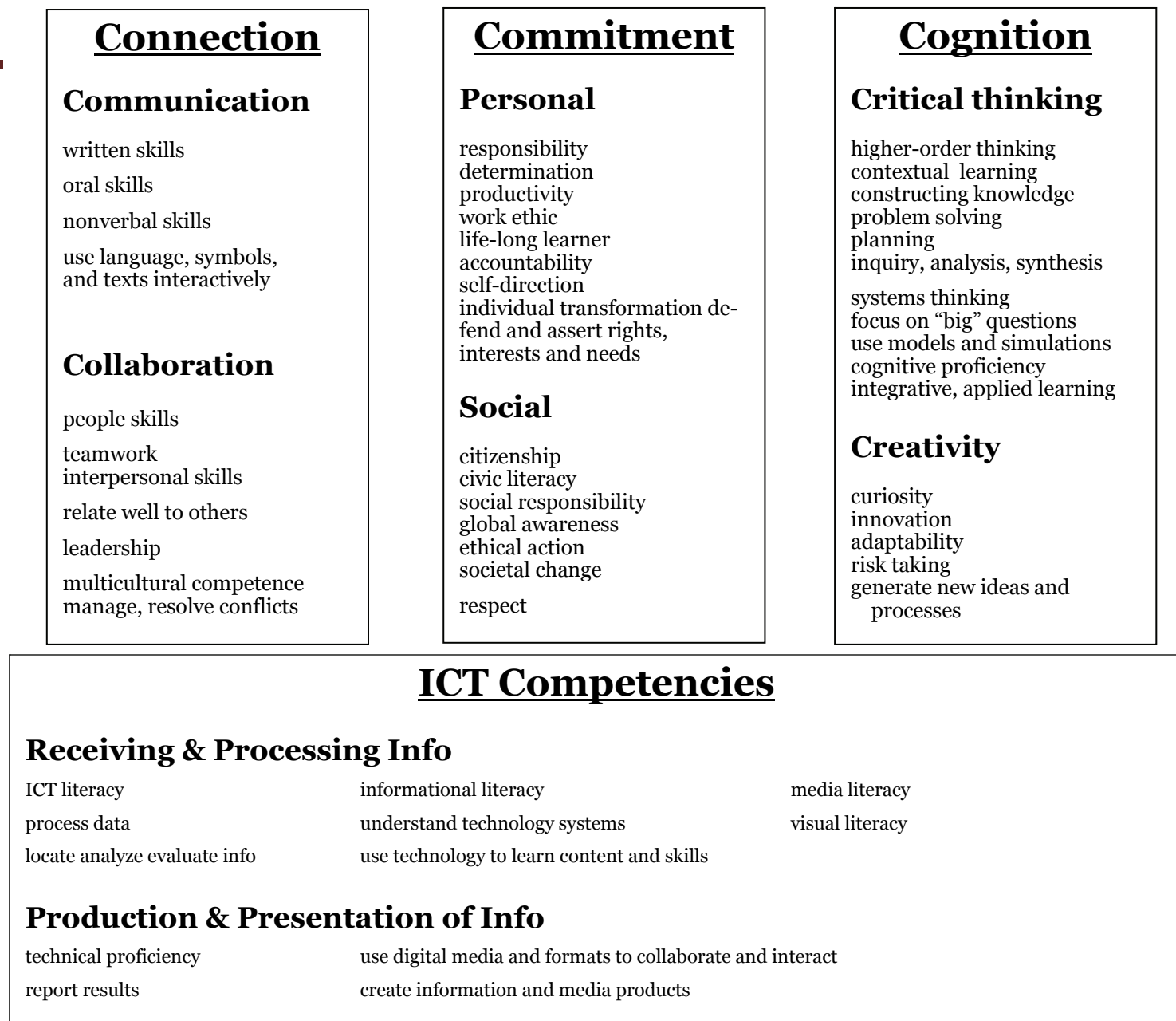


Figure 2: Compiled attributes and skills of five 21st Century skill models in the analysis

At Issue...How can we use these skills to move towards 21st Century learning?

The key here is an integration of all the components with those central *ICT Competencies*. The range of skills listed in Figure 2, can be divided into two domains: First, a new literacy for receiving and processing information and second, a new technology skillset for the production and presentation of information. The Common Core State Standards Initiative website (corestandards.org) addresses this in its “Key Design Consideration” page, specifying that students need the ability to gather, synthesize, and report on information and ideas and that the need to produce and consume media is embedded throughout the Standards rather than being included in a separate section. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has created a Common Core toolkit which can be accessed online. [<http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/P21CommonCoreToolkit.pdf>]

This information can be of use when designing Common Core aligned lesson plans or writing goals and highlights for the APPR. Ultimately, 21st Century Skills is a short-hand, catch-all term reflecting educational trends of the beginning of the 21st Century. As educators we need to be familiar with these skills and terminology, because in many instances, we are preparing our students for jobs in the future that do not even yet exist.

Cuomo is now leading the charge to have 50% of a teacher's evaluation based on the state test assessment, which for the moment, affects 3-8 ELA and Math. It is easy to see the next move will be to tie all teachers districtwide to these state tests. In addition, he is requiring that an outside, independent evaluator conduct an observation that will comprise 35% of a teacher's composite score. The remaining 15% composite score will ostensibly come from your building administrator and/or more testing. Governor Cuomo has stated that the current APPR is a flawed evaluation tool because it is his expectation that at least 20% of the teachers in New York should be rated ineffective to be commensurate with student failure as evidenced by test scores. The outcome will be that more teachers will be rated ineffective leading to possible termination.

While financially strapped school districts around the state struggle to maintain programs, Governor Cuomo has applauded the privatization of schools while demonizing public schools. Charter schools siphon much needed funds from public schools. Charter schools are not held to the same level of scrutiny as public schools, nor do they have the same transparency as public schools. They are able to cull better performing students into their schools through interviewing processes, sometimes referred to as "creaming." Perhaps most important to the Governor and others who promote the privatization of public schools is that charter schools are rarely unionized, their employees earn less, have fewer benefits, and are at-will employees. At-will teachers can be (and are!) terminated on the spot without any due process whatsoever. Governor Cuomo, in his State of the State speech, said he wants the charter school cap lifted from 250 schools to over 500! Currently New York State does not even have 250 charter schools, so many question his motivation for doubling the cap.

On February 25, 2015, a forum was held at the Town Hall in Greenburgh, NY to discuss Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget Proposals. The public had opportunity to address the Assemblymembers on education policy and the Governor's funding for public education. Assemblymembers that were present included J. Gary Pretlow, Sandy Galef, Thomas Abinanti, Amy Paulin, Shelley Mayer, Steven Otis, and David Buchwald. The Assemblymembers listened attentively and with active interest as one speaker after another expressed their views. Although the time available for individuals to speak filled up quickly leaving many on a wait-list to speak, several Yonkers teachers did get their chance to speak their minds. The following are excerpts from some of the Yonkers teachers.

"It is very frustrating to me, as a professional with over two decades of experience with children, that so much valuable instructional time and money is spent on the creation and administering of exams that are not accurately reflecting what happens in the classroom and that these flawed exams are being used to evaluate teachers. In this climate of over testing, this test is overwhelming to some students and is disregarded by others. It takes away from the precious time and resources that are already so limited due to the constant barrage of testing that children are being subjected to." **Joanne Casella, art teacher**

"The governor's proposed budget will take away everything we are already fighting for. Our superintendent is already begging for \$89 million to restore the programs that have been taken from our already broken district. You want us to test these children on computers, computers that are 10 years old with headphones that don't work. You want us to instruct using scripted modules. I'm sorry, I don't need a script, especially one written by men and women who have never stepped foot in a classroom." **Leonor Cassese Tierney, Elementary Teacher**

"I need hardly tell you of the cataclysmic effect the emphasis on standardized testing and the APPR have had. All across the state, students, teachers, administrators, school boards have joined together to oppose these ill conceived educational policies and to question the motive behind their imposition. Are the public schools simply being set up to fail, as many believe? Are we seeing the beginning of the end of public education? Is the future one of privatization and education for profit?" **Marc Pekowsky at Budget Meeting, Music Teacher and Mahopac BOE Trustee**

Speaking out about what is occurring in public education shouldn't be left to just a few teachers. Take action! Now is the time to be active! Call your elected officials and express your opinion about what Governor Cuomo is actively doing in Albany today that affects public education. Go to NYSUT.org and use the Member Action Center (MAC) to send emails and faxes to local politicians. Download the MAC to your smartphone, stay educated, and keep our concerns front and center.

Call Governor Cuomo TODAY!

(518) 474-8390



YFT President Pat Puleo passionately addresses members of our state assembly



Pat Puleo, Warren Hueber, Florence McCue & Erin Gorman were only part of the team that was proudly representing Yonkers



YFT member and Mahopac Board of Education Trustee, Marc Pekowsky, poses pertinent questions to the panel