

March 29, 2004

Honorable Michael Bloomberg
The City of New York
Office of the Mayor
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mayor Bloomberg,

Manhattan Community Board No.4 is deeply dismayed about the vote on March 15 of the Panel for Educational Policy to hold back New York City 3rd graders if they fail a standardized test. We agree with the New York Times that the use of a single test score to make promotion decisions is irresponsible. The fact that this test, in many cases, may be the first major standardized exam with which these children are faced, makes the Panel's vote not only irresponsible, but callously so.

We are particularly troubled by the fact that the burden of this policy will fall most heavily on black and Hispanic children. The education of some of our most vulnerable kids must not be sacrificed on the political altar of meretricious test scores.

As the Panel was undoubtedly aware, next year another test will be given to 4th graders statewide. Inevitably those resultant test scores will be higher than they should be since those city 3rd graders who would have pulled the score down would have been kept back. To attain flattering, though skewed, test scores by holding back and stigmatizing children who desperately need help, is an unacceptably cynical manipulation of our school system and an unconscionable disregard for these kids.

Mandatory retention was imposed before in our city in the 1980s. It was a disaster then. We see no evidence that it will be anything less now. Two major studies by the Consortium on Chicago School Research to be released on April 6 are expected to conclusively demonstrate that Chicago's seven year attempt to end social promotion is also a failure. According to the lead author of the study, the last thing you want to do is to retain kids.

To be clear: this Board does not endorse social promotion. Social promotion, however, is not the real issue here. The issue is what to do about 3rd grade children who have not mastered all the skills necessary to enter the 4th grade. Promoting them automatically is bad. Holding them back, however, is worse. Research and experience is compelling: holding a child back, removing them from their age group, will increase the sense of failure not only of the child, but also of the child's family and the child's teacher. You do not need research to show what the effects of that increased sense of failure will have.

What works? The evidence is also compelling: monitor every single child's progress, especially focusing on those in kindergarten who may be struggling; provide the sort of individualized attention required; provide assistance for teachers so they can give that attention; have smaller class sizes in the lower grades; educate families on how to help their children.

That probably would make sense even to the third graders the Panel wishes to hold back. The kids might have trouble, however, with the concept of stacking a Panel to get a vote which flies in the face of common sense, research, and experience. Silencing in this instance, with all due respect Mr. Mayor, was not golden.

Sincerely,

Walter Mankoff
Chair

cc C. Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President
Local Elected Officials
Joel I. Klein, Schools Chancellor

Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Member
United States Congress
201 Varick Street, Suite 669
New York, New York 10014

March 29, 2004

Dear Congressman Nadler,

Manhattan Community Board No. 4 would like to express our concern over the report submitted by the President's Commission on the United States Postal Services in July 2003. It is our understanding that the report's recommendations include the outsourcing of postal functions, the centralization of post offices and the ensuing closing of smaller facilities, such as those which serve the neighborhoods of Chelsea and Clinton, and the subsequent loss of postal worker's jobs.

We are especially concerned that the suggested restructuring of the Post Office might allow access to our mailboxes by non government employers, such as Fed X or UPS; that our mail may be handled by other than U.S. Government employees; that universal postal rates may dissolved; that the postal workers right to collective bargaining may be curtailed; and that mail delivery may be erratic or late due to a lack of Government accountability.

The United States Post Office since it was founded in 1793 by Benjamin Franklin has provided great service to the people of the United States and to the communities of Chelsea and Clinton. It remains a miracle of efficient, affordable communication for all people to this day delivering nationwide over 200 billion pieces of mail every year. We urge you to vote against legislation which would adversely affect postal service in our community.

Sincerely,

Walter Mankoff
Chair

cc Post Master General
Local Elected Officials
Gregory C. Wilson, American Postal Workers Union