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Newly Elected N.Y. Chancellor Voices Sympathy for Testing Opt-Outs

By [Daarel Burnette II](#) on March 22, 2016 4:59 PM

Betty Rosa, New York's newly elected school chancellor, made waves Monday when she said at a news conference that if she were a parent, she would have her children sit out the state's upcoming exams.

Further, [according to Newsday](#), Rosa said the state's standardized tests, which are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, were designed so that many students would fail, giving policymakers a chance to point to a crisis in the state's school system.

"I want to be crystal clear," Rosa said shortly after her election by the state's Board of Regents. "If I was a parent and not on the Board of Regents, I would opt out at this time."

Her comments came just weeks before students are set to take the state's test, New York State Testing Program, which occurs throughout April.

The state's Board of Regents has been embroiled in a years-long battle with politicians, the state's teachers' unions and an aggressive testing opt-out movement on issues including the state's academic standards, which standardized test should be given, and how student test results should be incorporated into teachers' evaluations.

Last year, 200,000, or a fifth of the state's students opted out of the state test, according to Newsday.

Rosa's position on parents opting their children out of the tests veers sharply from that of her predecessor, Merryl Tisch, who stepped down as chancellor Monday and whose 20-year tenure on the board ends this month. Tisch led the state through its adoption of the common core and tying test results to teacher evaluations, moves that the state's governor no longer supports.

Tisch has long dismissed the opt-out movement as destructive. In an attempt to quell the movement, she said in a [widely distributed WNYC radio interview](#) last year that the opt-out movement could end up requiring the state to adopt a national test.

And in [an interview with the New York Times](#) published last week, Tisch said she regrets rolling out the standards and the new evaluations at the same time.

"I think the debate over how to evaluate a teacher contaminated the more-important work," she said. The subsequent vitriol, she told the Times, "drowned out all the work we were doing."

Rosa said in an interview [with the Times earlier this month](#) that while she believes in high standards, the state department should be more cognizant of the impact poverty has on test results.

"It's not that you're using poverty as an excuse— it's recognizing that it does have an impact," she said. "I think that we really have to get to a place where we can have these honest conversations."

Rosa spent much of her early childhood in Puerto Rico, and started her career as a bilingual teacher in New York City before moving up the ranks to serve as a principal and district administrator. She was appointed to the board in 2008.

In recent years, she's run B.D.J. & J. Associates, a consultant agency that works with urban districts to turn around failing schools.

Reaction to her hiring has been swift.

Opt-out activists, who have been holding rallies across the state in recent weeks, said her comments emboldened their movement. They're attempting to get at least as many students to opt out of this year's tests which start next month.

"I think it's still going to be very large," Jeanette Deutermann, a founder of Long Island Opt Out [told WNYC](#) about the number of students expected to opt out this year. "As far as numbers, we never know until the first day. All we do is try to spread awareness and it plays out how it plays out."

High Achievement New York, a business advocacy group, praised Rosa's appointment, but said in a statement that it came in part because



parents from the opt-out movement supported her.

"With today's election, it is now time for the organizers of the so-called opt-out movement to finally take yes for an answer and stop urging children to refuse to take tests," the organization said. "And they must end their campaign to destroy higher standards.

Photo: Betty Rosa, seated, is applauded after being elected chancellor of the New York Board of Regents during a meeting on March 21, in Albany, N.Y. Rosa, a former superintendent from the Bronx, replaces Merryl Tisch, who's stepping down from the board after 20 years, the last seven as its leader. (Mike Groll/AP)

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