



May 8, 2012

NYS GIS Association
P.O. Box 17
Cohoes, NY 12047

Merryl H. Tisch, Chancellor, Board of Regents
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Board of Regents, Room 110 EB
Albany, New York 12234

Re: Opposition to Making Global History and Geography Exams Optional

Dear Chancellor Tisch and the New York State Board of Regents,

On behalf of the New York State GIS Association, a statewide professional organization representing the interests of the entire geospatial community within New York, please find this letter opposing the New York State Education Department's recommendations to the Board of Regents to make the global history and geography exams optional.

While the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) has become a common focus in classrooms across the country, the ultimate objective for the American Education System is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to build on as they chose paths to further their education or enter the workforce. Making global history and geography optional for New York students, will only proliferate the gap between American students and students in other countries in understanding this increasingly globalized world.

Our collective goal should be to prepare future business leaders, scientists, researchers, and decision makers who will help shape our future. Eliminating the requirement to take these two exams will decrease students understanding of relationships between different cultures, economic practices, and environmental issues. Geography is more than maps. It provides an understanding into the complex relationships that govern our world. Ultimately, the aim of the New York State Education system is to make a competent and competitive workforce that lives and earns money in New York State. A lack of knowledge in geography places us at a competitive disadvantage in comparison to other states, and more importantly, to the rest of the globe. Recently, the U.S. Department of Labor recognized the geospatial industry as one of the nation's top growing industries and has begun making

investments geospatial technology training. New York, as a State, needs to fully prepare its students to take advantage of this emerging industry.

Based on the 2010 Nation's Geography Report Card from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 20% of high school seniors were found to be proficient in geography. Without geography and global history, the students who will be prepared through the New York State education system, will continue to fall behind in their understanding of the world in which they are citizens.

As professionals who will ultimately hire students from the New York school system, we urge you to strongly reconsider making these two exams options. Students who graduate from high school in New York and will one day become our employees, should have a clear understanding of historical global events and differences in cultural beliefs and practices that have helped shaped, and will continue to shape, the human and physical landscapes in our world.

Ultimately, you have a choice to make. You can continue to make an understanding of global history and geography a key part of New York students' education graduation requirement, or you can make it an option. However, in making these exams an option, you ultimately risk producing students who lack basic skills to make them competitive in our global economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Bruce Oswald', written in a cursive style.

R. Bruce Oswald, President
NYS GIS Association

cc: NYS GIS Assoc. Board