



May 6, 2015

Dr. Elizabeth Berlin
Acting Commissioner
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dr. Ken Wagner
Senior Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Drs. Berlin and Wagner,

We would like to thank the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents for allowing the New York City Parents Union an opportunity to speak to the real issue of education reform in New York State. As we have reviewed the questions being asked by NYSED and some of the responses being put forward by some of the many advocates from across the state, we have come to realize that the problem we face in education today is so much more than a complex list of questions with an even more complex series of recommendations to address the education shortfall within our state.

It is the opinion of the New York City Parents Union that the real problems with education in New York State begin with honesty and fairness and accountability. To address the first issue of honesty; we believe that reform will not begin until all parties involved in education, parents, teachers, school administrators, teachers unions, legislators and Governor Cuomo, recognize the depth of the crisis that has fallen upon our educational system. We need to be honest in the sense that we already know and understand that many if not most of our students throughout the state, especially in the New York City Schools District cannot read, write and do math at grade level. We must not be afraid to publicly recognize that many of our classrooms have students who cannot perform at grade level. Yet, year after year, we test for grade level, are stymied by the results and call for stronger measures, which again do not address or measure the real issues involved in the education of our children or the manner in which they are tested.

We will never see progress in the education of our children unless we begin to measure progress with a focus on teaching and learning geared to an acknowledgement of the educational level our students currently possess, where they should be, and what system can be developed to achieve this goal during their career in our school system.

Members of the New York City Parents Union appreciate the conversation about pedagogical remedies for our children, such as new teachers evaluations, new testing

standards and accountability but we also recognize that without fairness and accountability in these new reforms, as in the past, we will fail before we begin.

We believe that any reform in education will only be achieved by measuring a student's academic progress from year to year. As mentioned before, honesty about our educational status is the first key step to development of successful reform. The second step is fairness. We must be fair with our students and we must be fair with our teachers. Please allow me to offer a real life scenario, which I am sure educators agree, will play out in every single school district in New York State.

It is September, and Mr. Adams, a 7th grade English teacher meets his new class for the year. In a perfect reality, the majority of his students would already be reading at or approaching a 7th grade level. Unfortunately, in our current situation, at least in the New York City School District, many of Mr. Adams' students cannot read at grade level. Mr. Adams has many students that can only read at a 3rd or 4th grade level. So the first issue of fairness is to recognize that many of our teachers who are hard working and dedicated to their profession, are working with students that do not meet the educational standards for the grade they are in. A second step to fairness is accountability. The previous teachers to Mr. Adams must be held accountable if it is found that they did not advance their students' academic progress.

It should be understood that as parents we do not feel that a teacher evaluation system should be designed with the sole purpose of removing low performing or struggling teachers. We believe that a new teacher evaluation system should be used as a tool to identify struggling teachers and provide them with the supports they need to become better educators. However, we also strongly believe that once a teacher has been identified as struggling; a countdown process begins that will allow for a fair time frame and structure for the teacher to obtain professional development and show improvement. It is our strongest belief, that teachers who cannot grow with professional development and cannot advance our children's academic progress should be removed from the system through an immediate, fair, and final removal process. The days of knowingly returning consistently low performing teachers to classrooms year after year without applying a measured goal for improvement must end!

As the year progresses, Mr. Adams works with his students and significant progress is made. Many of his students have closed their personal achievement gap and they have increased their reading skills by at least one to two grade levels. This is a tremendous success not only for Mr. Adams but for his students as well. Instead of recognizing and celebrating their success, Mr. Adams' students will be given a state test for the grade they are in. We will be testing students we already know to be at a 4th or 5th grade performance level with a 7th grade performance test. Is there any wonder what the outcome will be? The outcome will be the same as it has been for a very long time. As adults who have created a system that does not measure progress, we will label our students as approximately 80% of students not being a grade level. We will completely ignore the significant progress made by Mr. Adams and his class and we will demoralize them again and again because they are not at grade level. Instead, we should be heralding

their individual progress with plans on how to keep the learning going in the next year's class.

Members of the New York City Parents Union want NYSED, the Board of Regents, our legislators and Governor Cuomo to acknowledge that without the honesty and fairness as described, setting percentages of weights for various testing and evaluations, growth targets, observations and observation rubrics, waivers and any other components of reform would be meaningless.

Education reform is a living and breathing process that must not be constrained by self-imposed union contracts and legislation. We must allow ourselves the ability to think beyond existing work rules and create a learning zone with the freedom to explore new technologies such as adaptive learning, longer school days and a longer school year. The education of our children can no longer be compartmentalized into a six-hour day that does not recognize the unique characteristics of our students, their parents and communities. Education reform cannot be a fixed policy that goes on for decades. True reform begins with a fair and honest assessment of where we are today and where we want to be tomorrow.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- ❖ **Teacher Evaluations.** The regulations should require:
 - Each student must have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) developed at the beginning of the school year to determine the student's current grade level and measure academic growth at the end of the school year. An assessment test conducted in September and another conducted in May to determine academic growth.
 - 40% test results for students determined to be on grade level on their September assessment test, be tied to teacher evaluations.
 - For kids *not* at grade level per the ILP and September assessment test, teacher evaluation rating must be based on students grade level improvement in the current school year, e.g. student improving one (1) grade level is effective, improving two (2) grade levels is highly effective.
 - 30% principal observations (35% for PreK – 2 teachers)
 - 10% of principal scoring must include teacher attendance and punctuality. Principals will use attendance records to make determination.

- Principals have authority to record all observations. Teacher consent not required.
 - School administrators observe classrooms at least four times per year for at least twenty minutes each visit.
 - 10% peer observations
 - Observation must be conducted by a teacher certified to teach the grade level.
 - Observation must be conducted by a teacher who has taught the specific grade for a minimum three (3) years.
 - 10% independent evaluators
 - Independent evaluators must be certified to teach the grades they are evaluating.
 - Independent evaluators must have a minimum three (3) years experience teaching the grade they are evaluating.
 - Independent evaluators have authority to record all observations. Teacher consent not required.
 - 5% parent survey beginning in grade PreK – 12.
 - 5% student survey beginning in grades 3 – 12.
- ❖ **Specialty Evaluations – Gym, Art, Technology and other cluster teachers**
- Develop a specialty evaluation that includes a September assessment and May assessment of students knowledge or physical/athletic abilities.
 - In the ILP, the goals for each student must be outlined and met by May to receive an Effective or Highly Effective rating.
- ❖ **Assistant Principal Evaluations (New York City School District)**
- Assistant Principals must be included in the new principal evaluation system and no longer under the old system of ‘Unsatisfactory’ or ‘Satisfactory’.

❖ **Teacher Evaluation Feedback**

- Principals and independent evaluators must provide teachers with feedback within five school days of an observation.
- Videotaped observations must be made available to teachers on encrypted servers so they too can evaluate their teaching methods.

❖ **Waiver Regarding Ineffective Teachers**

- We do not support any waivers that will permit the school districts to condemn students to a teacher rated Ineffective for two consecutive school years.

Again, we would like to thank the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents for this opportunity to present on behalf of the *independent* parents of the New York City School District. We would like to impart one thing for each of you to remember and that is simply that the interests of our children must always come first.

The education of our children is the reason this entire system exists, it is why we are here today. We would like you to remember that reform has no boundaries. Reform should not be expected to fit into an existing system. Reform should create new ideas and strategies to replace outdated ideas and strategies. Realistic expectations, accountability and a willingness to collaborate and develop new policies as a community of parents, educators and legislators, is the only way ensure every child has equal access to a well-rounded, high-quality education.

Respectfully,



Mona Davids
President



Sam Pirozzolo
Vice President