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Derrell Bradford
Executive Director

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Distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees:

My name is Derrell Bradford and I am the executive director of NYCAN: The New York Campaign for Achievement Now, a non profit group advocating for great teachers for kids and broader educational opportunities for families in the Empire State. Today I am here in support of the education platform articulated in Governor Cuomo's Opportunity Agenda. More specifically, NYCAN supports the Governor's proposed changes to make sure every child gets a great teacher while ensuring that the state's evaluation system is fair and rigorous, his desire to raise the cap on charter schools, and lastly his proposal to allow corporations to contribute to nonprofits that will grant scholarships to children across the state.

NYCAN supports these initiatives first and foremost because our children are the most important asset we have as a society; our shared future exists in each and every one of them and we should be doing everything possible to ensure that all children—including the 250,000 who have languished, as the Governor notes, in chronically underperforming schools for over a decade—receive an education that makes them both productive citizens and, ultimately, truly free in our society. NYCAN believes now is precisely the right time to make this dream a reality.

I. Teacher Quality, Evaluation, and Assignment

Overhauling the way we recruit, reward, and retain great teachers—and if necessary remove those for whom teaching is not the right fit—are at the center of both the Governor's proposals and a national discussion about how we ensure every child who attends a public school has an excellent teacher. A teacher is the most important in-school factor in a child's education and a highly effective teacher—one who can spur growth of more than one year over the course of a school year—is priceless, particularly when we focus on closing the achievement gap. But our current system is not set up to identify, compensate, and support those who are capable of this feat, nor expedite the fair removal of those who are not meeting reasonable student learning expectations. Consider the following:

- As former Teachers College head Arthur Levine notes, colleges of education have not aligned their offerings with the challenges of the day, generating thousands of

new teachers who are poorly prepared and who are poorly supported when they enter their classrooms.

- As the Center for American Progress and the Obama administration's Office for Civil Rights have found, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students disproportionately receive inexperienced teachers, which is problematic both for the teachers and the students they serve. They are also more likely to receive teachers without a specialty in the subject they teach.
- Objective measures of teachers' impact on student achievement—like value added growth measures—are reliable predictors of teacher quality. As Harvard's Raj Chetty and his colleagues John Friedman and Jonah Rockoff found in their seminal study "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers," which tracked 2.5 million children in a large urban school district from elementary and middle school to adulthood, a teacher's ability to increase student achievement on standardized assessments tracks improved life outcomes for those students in critical areas including higher rates of college attendance, higher salaries, and lower rates of teenage pregnancy.
- If a child has a highly effective teacher instead of simply an effective one, for four or five years consecutively, the increased learning would be enough to close the academic gap between the typical low-income, eligible for free or reduced-price lunch student and an average one not eligible for these programs.
- Though the process has improved thanks to the efforts of the Governor and this legislature in 2010 and 2012, it still takes 190 days in New York City and 177 days in the rest of the state to remove an ineffective teacher. This is a lifetime's worth of learning lost particularly for a child trying to close the achievement gap.

Great teaching and excellent teachers matter...tremendously so, and the Governor's agenda addresses the systemic inequities cited here in a forthright fashion that builds on recommendations from the Board of Regents and national trends in teacher evaluation, preparation, assignment and support.

- The Governor's clinical residency and training proposal expands on a pilot conducted by the Board of Regents with funds from President Obama's signature Race to the Top initiative. A white paper commissioned by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and a Blue-Ribbon panel it assembled (whose members included Arthur Levine and former head of the National Education Association Dennis van Roekel among others) strongly supports these deep residency training programs for teachers.
- The Teacher Excellence Fund mirrors elements that former UFT head, Randi Weingarten, supported in the breakthrough deal reached in nearby Newark, NJ, which offered bonuses for highly effective teachers who taught in challenging schools and in difficult-to-staff subject areas.

- The proposal to increase the percentage of objective data used to determine teacher effectiveness and eliminate the local growth measure (also supported by the Board of Regents) will provide greater differentiation among teacher evaluations while making the acquisition of a highly effective rating a reward for excellence in the classroom and driving student achievement.
- And changing the length of time to acquire tenure from the current three years to five years, with ratings of effective or better during that time, truly makes tenure a reward for professional excellence in the classroom, not just time served. And it's what teachers want as well, with a 2012 survey of 10,000 teachers showing that, on average, teachers believed it was reasonable to work 5.4 years before being evaluated for tenure.

Some have argued recently that the state's obligation to our students is really only one of funding, not of quality. They've essentially offered that "we promise you a teacher, but we're not required to give you an excellent one." We disagree. You do not pursue a suite of reforms such as this because you believe teaching is unimportant; you do so because you know it is profoundly important. And as such we must raise the barrier to entry, increase the professionalism, pay, and status of those who are truly excellent at it, and respectfully remove those for whom teaching is not the right fit. This view is grounded in the reality that teachers are real human beings with an enormously important task in our society. Pretending that there is no differentiation among the teaching corps does a great disservice to our students and to our teachers as well.

II. Don't Cap Progress

Raising the charter cap and eliminating the regional restrictions on where charters can be located are excellent next steps for New York State, which has high charter demand and is nationally recognized for excellence in its charter school sector.

For context, it is important to understand exactly how many charter schools there are in New York State. Some would have us believe that charter schools are rapidly subsuming the universe of public education in New York. These people and organizations are entitled to their own spin but not their own facts. Of the 4,775 public schools in New York State, only 258 (5.4 percent) are public charter schools. If the cap is increased by 100 to 560, as the Governor has proposed, and every school were opened this fall, charter schools would still only constitute 11.5 percent of the state's public schools. Far from a revolution, this is a modest increase in the state's capacity to create new school options for its students.

And the demand for these schools is there. According to the New York City Charter School Center, there are nearly 50,000 students on charter school waiting lists in New York City alone.

And charter schools are getting the job done for our neediest students. As the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) has shown, charter schools statewide are offering the equivalent of 79 days of extra learning in math, and 36 extra days in reading for students who are overwhelmingly low-income and minority. And as economist Caroline Hoxby found, these gains can't be explained away by selection bias or parental motivation. They are, instead, created and sustained by the schools themselves.

Chartering is a powerful tool for leveling the academic playing field for the overwhelmingly minority and low-income universe of children who attend them. But the chartering power also presents an opportunity for New York, and many other states, to find new ways to light the path forward for our children. Right now, there are children who are excelling in schools that did not exist just five years ago. Chartering has created excellence, opportunity, and an excellent education in places where these things were previously scarce and, in some instances, non-existent. For the sake of the 250,000 children in chronically underperforming schools, or the 143,000 children in New York City who attend schools where 90 percent or more of students failed the most recent round of state assessments, don't cap progress. I urge you to support raising the state's charter school cap and eliminating the regional restriction on charters as well.

III. Invest in Education

"Now" is one of the most powerful words in any language, and with good reason. Immediacy—the ability to not wait—has an impact that can never be underestimated.

The Governor's Education Tax Credit proposal, which will allow taxpayers to claim a tax credit for eligible contributions to public schools, school improvement organizations, local education funds and educational scholarship organizations, brings the power of "now" to families looking for more choices and better options for the education of their children, and creates an opportunity for school districts to raise additional funds for new programming and staff, especially in those areas vulnerable to budget cuts like art, music, tutoring and sports.

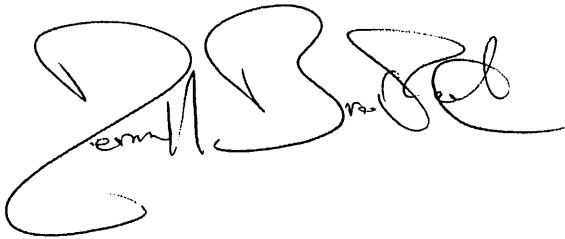
Right now there is a child attending a school that does not work for him or her somewhere in this state. And in many cases there is an independent or parochial school right down the street, or around the corner, that would offer that same child an excellent education and a chance at a prosperous and free future. But for many working class and low-income families, tuition is the high a barrier between their child and an excellent education. At the same time, there are bright and talented people in our traditional district schools who are ready to drive innovation therein. The Governor's tax credit proposal—which has already been passed as a stand-alone piece of legislation by the state senate, makes both of these instances a priority.

State governments across the country use business tax credits for many things, from real estate development to filmmaking. The Governor's tax credit proposal allows us to use this same tool to empower families and protect programs in our education system. As I stated earlier, there are myriad things we give the business community tax credits for. What could be a better use of this tool than to invest in the immediacy of educational

opportunities for our students, while creating a lever for those who are trying to support great programs for our district systems? With this proposal, all of our children win.

Members of the committee, I urge you to enact all of these proposals during the current budget cycle. Change never comes easily and there is never a perfect time to do anything; but there are times that are better than others to do what is right for our children and our teachers and to expand our capacity to ensure that every child in the Empire State receives a quality education. If there is any doubt in your minds I want to assure you: the time to do these things is indeed right now.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derrell Bradford". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "Derrell" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bradford".

Derrell Bradford
Executive Director
NYCAN: The New York Campaign for Achievement Now