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MEMORANDUM

TO: All Interested Parties
FROM: Jenny Sedlis, Executive Director, StudentsFirstNY
DATE: February 3rd, 2015
RE: Governor Cuomo's Plan to Improve Education for All New York Students

Overview

Governor Cuomo's Opportunity Agenda outlines proposals that would dramatically improve student achievement across the state, and particularly in low-income communities of color. The education system for those students is in crisis.

Numbers to know:

- **<1%:** Percentage of teachers in New York State rated ineffective.
- **18% and 19%:** Percentage of black students who read and do math at grade level, compared to 39 and 44 percent of white students.
- **14% and 18%:** Percentage of black and Latino students who graduate from high school ready to do college work, compared to 50 percent of white students.¹
- **250,000:** Number of students who have been enrolled in a failing school in the past ten years in New York state.²
- **93%:** Percentage of students in failing schools who are black or Latino.
- **38%:** The chance a black or Latino student has of attending a failing school, compared to 2.8 percent for a white student.³
- **4:** A student in a heavily black and Latino NYC school is 4 times more likely to have an "Unsatisfactory" rated teacher.⁴

In order to address the crisis, Governor Cuomo has laid out an ambitious agenda that will:

- Add over \$1 billion in new funding to our school budget.
- Ensure our students are taught by the highest quality teachers.
- Protect our most vulnerable students currently trapped in failing schools.

¹ NYSED, *Measuring Student Progress in Grades 3-8 Math and English Language Arts*, 2014
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/ela-math/2014/2014Grades3-8ELAMath-final8-13-14.pdf>

² Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, *Opportunity Agenda, 2015 State of the State, 2015*
https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/2015_Opportunity_Agenda_Book.pdf

³ Families for Excellent Schools, *The Forgotten Fourth: Across New York City, one-fourth of all schools are failing 9 out of 10 children*, 2014 http://www.familiesforexcellentschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TheForgottenFourth_V4.pdf

⁴ StudentsFirstNY, *Unsatisfactory: The Distribution of Teacher Quality in New York City*, 2013
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhlmx.cloudfront.net/studentsfirstny/pages/468/attachments/original/1421098966/SFNY-Unsatisfactory-Report.pdf?1421098966>

- Give families the high quality school options they deserve.

Taken together, the combination of additional funding and reform has the potential to dramatically improve education in New York State, particularly for low-income students of color.

The Governor's Plan: \$1 Billion in New Funding, Reforms to Make Our Schools Great

Better teachers for our kids

Research shows that nothing has a more positive impact on a student's future success than a high-quality teacher. Shamefully, black and Latino students have been saddled with ineffective instructors, setting them back in their academic careers, decreasing future earning potential, and increasing the likelihood of detrimental social conditions.⁵

1. Better evaluations for our teachers, fewer tests for our kids

Eliminating the local measure of student growth, which has proven to be unreliable and incomparable across districts, would reduce the number of standardized tests students are required to take. Setting scoring bands at the state level would help prevent districts from undermining the integrity of the teacher evaluation process by watering down standards.

2. No automatic job for life without performance

Governor Cuomo's proposal to require that a teacher receive five consecutive annual ratings of "Effective" or "Highly Effective" before tenure is granted significantly raises the bar for tenure eligibility and for the teaching profession at large. Research shows that five years of performance represent a close reflection of teachers' long-term performance.

3. Get the best and brightest into schools of education and prepare them for the classroom

While education superpowers like Finland and Singapore recruit top candidates to its education schools, the U.S. consistently recruits teachers from the bottom of the applicant pool. Requiring that graduate teacher preparation programs put in place higher admissions standards and closing the weakest teacher education programs will improve the quality of instruction we deliver to kids across the board.

Help Students Trapped in Failing Schools

With hundreds of thousands of black and Latino students trapped in failing schools, we cannot lose any time turning around our lowest performing schools.

1. No student should have an ineffective teacher two years in a row

No student should have a teacher unequipped to do the job and should absolutely never suffer with ineffective teachers for multiple years, as the harm done to the student can be irreparable. Governor Cuomo's proposal would prohibit the assignment of a student to ineffective teachers in consecutive school years.

2. If a school is failing for three years, intervene and turn it around

⁵ Raj Chetty et al, "The Long-Term Impacts of Teachers", 2011 <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17699.pdf>

Governor Cuomo is boldly standing up for students trapped in persistently failing schools, 93% of whom are students of color and 82% of whom are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. He has proposed legislation appointing receivers to oversee failing schools and districts, taking his cue from the Massachusetts model that has successfully spurred improvements in struggling schools.

3. A fairer, faster dismissal process

Removing grossly ineffective teachers from our schools is essential to getting our students the education they deserve. Currently the process for doing so is far too burdensome and expensive. The average proceeding for removing an incompetent teacher lasts 830 days and costs taxpayers \$313,000. Over a 10-year period (1997-2007), under largely the same process, just 12 of New York City's 75,000 teachers were dismissed for incompetence.

Give Parents Better School Choices

Affluent parents have a multitude of school options for their children. Low-income parents of color should have the same opportunities. A child's future should be as grand as her dreams, not as narrow as her zip code.

1. Raise the arbitrary cap on charter schools

With 50,000 students in New York City alone on waiting lists for a seat in a high quality charter school, raising the cap by 100 charter schools is a step in the right direction.

2. Fund all students the same

Charter schools only receive 67% of the per-pupil funding awarded to district schools. Recognizing the value of excellent charter schools for families and students in high - need districts, the Governor has recommended an increase in per-pupil charter funding. In addition, charters need the flexibility to give their students the best possible education without political burdens.

3. Help working parents paying tuition

Supporting private investments in educational programs will encourage contributions to public schools, nonprofits dedicated to the improvement of schools, local education funds, and organizations awarding educational scholarships. The education tax credit bill is supported by a coalition of community, labor, and religious groups.