



May 6, 2015

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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade performance level with a 7<sup>th</sup> 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





### **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**

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