June 12, 2020

BY EMAIL

Members of the New York State Board of Regents
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Re: Giving Overage 12th Graders the Chance to Graduate After COVID-19

Dear Chancellor Rosa, Members of the Board of Regents and Interim Commissioner Tahoe:

As the 2019-20 school year quickly draws to a close, we are writing as parents, students, educators, and advocates across New York State to follow up on our May 11th letter. We continue to urge the New York State Education Department (SED) and the Board of Regents to give students aging out of school this year the opportunity to return to high school for the 2020-21 school year, rather than lose their chance to earn a high school diploma due to the pandemic.

The need for your guidance on this issue is extremely urgent. In the absence of action by SED and the Board of Regents, up to 2,500 overage students will lose their opportunity to earn a high school diploma when they age out of school just two weeks from today. This is also a racial equity matter. In New York State, Black high school graduates are seven times more likely than White students to need six years in high school.1 Latinx students are 7.3 times as likely to need six years. Many students aging out this year were slated to be seventh-year graduates; the racial disparities among these students are likely even more stark. These students are part of families and communities that have already been disproportionately burdened by the coronavirus pandemic.

Overage students are also overwhelmingly multilingual learners and students with disabilities. We are concerned that, due to COVID-19, 21-year-old students with disabilities have not had the opportunity to engage in the transition planning that would normally happen before they age out of school. We want to ensure these young people can return to school to receive the transition support that is not only critical to their future but legally required.

To ensure that 21-year-old students have the chance to earn their high school diploma and prepare for the transition to jobs and post-secondary programs, SED and the Board of Regents must issue guidance directing school districts to permit all students aging out this year without a diploma to continue their studies when school buildings reopen during the upcoming school year. In the absence of such action, overage students will be forced to transition to unfamiliar adult education programs or face surging unemployment rates without a diploma.

---

We were glad to hear at this week’s Board of Regents meeting that you are discussing this issue. The Board of Regents has the authority to direct school districts to allow overage students to remain in high school and should not leave this important decision to an individual district or school. With the school year ending in two weeks, the Board of Regents and SED must act urgently to ensure students aging out of school can return and receive the education they missed out on due to the pandemic.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and we stand ready to support your efforts to develop guidance. Please contact Ashley Grant at agrant@advocatesforchildren.org or 212-822-9548 or with any questions or to discuss our recommendations. We wish you health, safety and courage as you continue to provide necessary leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Organizations
Advocates for Children of New York
Alliance for Quality Education
ARISE Coalition
Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association
Bailey's Cafe
Bangladeshi American Community Development and Youth Services (BACDYS)
Big Picture Learning
Bronx Independent Living Services
Bronx International HS
Brooklyn Community Services
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Center for the Disabled
Bronx Arena High School
Brunswick Central School District
Business Teachers Association of New York State
CAMBA
Campaign for Tomorrow’s Workforce
Capital Region Refugee Roundtable
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
The Children's Agenda
Children's Defense Fund - NY
The Children's Law Center
Chinese Progressive Association
Citywide Council on High Schools
Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE)
Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York
Coalition for Homeless Youth
Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance
Community Service Society
Comprehensive Youth Development
Cooke School and Institute
Council for a Strong America
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Court Appointed Special Advocates - NYC
Disability Rights New York
EdTrust
Eskolta School Research and Design
ExpandED Schools
Faith in New York
Families Together in New York State
Fifth Avenue Committee
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Futures and Options
Getting Out & Staying Out
Girl Vow, Inc.
Good Shepherd Services
Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute
Haitian Americans United for Progress
HERE to HERE
Hispanic Federation
INCLUDEnyc
Independent Gray Party for NY
IntegrateNYC
Internationals Network for Public Schools
The James Baldwin School
JobsFirstNYC
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
Latina Moms Connect
Lawyers for Children, Inc.
Learning to Work Coalition
Learning Disabilities Association of New York State
The Legal Aid Society
Long Island Advocacy Center
Long Island Latino Teachers Association
The Manhattan International HS
Mental Health Association of New York City
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.
New Visions for Public Schools
New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
New York Math Academy and Coaching Services
New York Performance Standards Consortium
New York State Association for Bilingual Education
New York State Coalition of 853 Schools
New York State Community of Practice on Family, School and Community Collaboration
New York State Disabilities Advocacy Association and Network
New York State Independent Living Council, Inc. (NYSILC)
New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYTESOL)
NY Stop Grad HST
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic
NYU Family Defense Clinic
NYU Metro Center
Parent to Parent New York, Inc.
The Partnership for the Homeless
Peer Health Exchange
Queens Community House
Refugees Helping Refugees
Zeinab Eyega, Sauti Yetu Center for African Women, Inc
SCO Family of Services
Sheltering Arms
Special Education Law and Advocacy Field Clinic, Benjamin L. Cardozo School of Law
Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center
Starbridge
Education Committee, Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council
Suffolk County Hispanic Advisory Board
Tomorrow’s Leaders NYC
United We Stand
Unity Preparatory Charter School of Brooklyn
Vibrant Emotional Health
The Urban Assembly
YOUTH POWER!
Zone 126

**Individuals**

Mark Alter, New York University
Kenn Arnaud
Laura Ascenzi-Moreno, Associate Professor & Bilingual Program Coordinator
Alison Angrisani
Nanette Bernabe
Emily Blanca Zapata

David C. Bloomfield, Esq., Professor of Educational Leadership, Law & Policy, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center
Ardranae Byer
Berena Cabarcas
Stuart F. Chen-Hayes, Ph.D., Professor, School of Education, CUNY Lehman College
Alona Cohen, Principal of Brooklyn Frontiers High School
Brian A. Collins, PhD; Associate Professor of Bilingual Education, Hunter College, CUNY
Desiree Colon
Lisa Finnerty Coggi, Parent/Advocate
Susan Ashland Crowson
Valerie DeClara, Parent
Della DeKay JD, EdD
Harrison Delfin, High School Teacher
Tara Nakashima Donahue
Max Donatelli, Family Advocate
Monica Enciso
Cecilia M. Espinosa
Irja Estrella, Parent
C. Anthony Finney, Principal
Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Parent
Dr. Harry Franqui-Rivera
Gartland
Jennifer Ghidiu, Parent/Advocate
Michael Godino, Advocate
Roberta Grogan, Parent/Advocate
Lorri Gumanow, Parent/Special Educator
Meghan Healy
Paullette Healy, CCSE
Shana Elizabeth Henry
Kevin Hesseltine, Principal, Flushing International High School
Sharon Holden, High School Counselor/Parent
Rochelle Hoot, Director of Special Education
Shelley Hubal, Parent
Muronji Inman-McCraw
Shaina Jacques
Dr. Max Jean-Paul,
Jaye Jones, PhD
Cassandra Kelley
Abigail Kirchman
Meredith Kornfeind
Joshua Laub, School Administrator
Liz Lazarus
Ted Leather
Marie F. Leblanc
Athena Leonardo, High School Teacher
April Leong, Principal, Liberation Diploma Plus High School
Jill Lewis-Flood, Parent/PIP Member
Marie Lewis
Ron Lodetti
Ellen McHugh, Co-Chair of Citywide Council on Special Education
Lynda McFarlan
Patrick McGillicuddy, Principal of East Brooklyn Community High School.
Chris McNell, Special Education Supervisor/Principal
Diana Medina Mendez, Parent
Anya Meier
Lucinda Mendez
Mark Anthony Mendez
Kate Menken, Professor of Linguistics and TESOL, Queens College - City University of New York
Dianne Morales
Jamie Munkatchy, High School Science Teacher
Regina Paleau, Parent
Christine Olson, High School Assistant Principal
Shelly October
Marcela Ossa Parra - Assistant Professor, Queens College, CUNY
Evelyn Perez, Parent
Tamra Plotnick
Sharon Poole, Education for Everyone Consultant
Luiggi Ramos, Special Education Teacher
Robert Reyes
Elizabeth Rivera
Lynn Russo, Parent
Maria T. (Maite) Sanchez
Serife Sarioglu, High School Paraprofessional
Kristi Seaver
Tracey Shannon, Parent
Thomas Sheppard, Parent Member, CEC 11
Bruce A. Shields, PhD, Associate Professor of Education, Daemen College
Daniel Storchan, Principal, Innovation Diploma Plus High School
Brady Smith, Principal, James Baldwin School
Natalie Yasmin Soto, High School ENL Teacher and Crew Advisor
Edmerlis Surinach
Shino Tanikawa
Caity Tully
Amy Ming Tsai, Council Member for Citywide Council for District 75
Lissette Velez
Pamela Villanueva
Christian Villenas, PhD
Marcia Vogel, Parent/Advocate
David Ward
Rahimah Wynn
Randy K. Young, Parent