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.

[1] See attached fact sheet, "Who are Sixth-Year Graduates," available at https://advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on_page/NP_6th_yr_grads_one-pg.pdf

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

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