

March 20, 2020

Chancellor Richard Carranza
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Access to Regional Enrichment Centers for Students who are Homeless

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

As organizations working with children and families experiencing homelessness in New York City, we write to ask that you ensure students who are homeless have access to the Regional Enrichment Centers when they open next week.

Rapidly transitioning 1.1 million students to remote learning is an unprecedented challenge for City schools, and we appreciate the Department of Education's efforts thus far. While we do not question the decision to close schools in light of the current public health emergency, we are deeply concerned about the disproportionate impact long-term closures are likely to have on the more than 100,000 City students who are homeless. This population already has some of the most abysmal educational outcomes of any student sub-group; for example, 17 percent of students who are homeless dropped out of high school in 2019, a rate 10 percentage points higher than that for permanently housed students. Schools are a crucial source of stability and social-emotional support for students who are homeless, and we fear that the COVID-19 outbreak will further exacerbate existing inequities, with long-lasting and potentially devastating consequences.

While remote learning will likely prove challenging for many students, this is *especially* true for those who lack permanent housing. All children need adequate space to learn, but families who are homeless may have multiple children of varying ages, grade levels, and learning needs confined to a single small room. Family shelters and commercial hotels are generally not appropriate educational environments, and many are not set up to provide access to remote learning. Moreover, parents of students who are homeless are already struggling to make ends meet and are particularly at risk for job loss without a reliable source of child care. Parents who are forced to stay home because they cannot send their children to school, have no one else to watch them, and are not employed in a sector that lends itself to working remotely will likely lose their source of income—making it that much harder for them to get back on their feet. For families who are doubled-up, having multiple children in over-crowded living situations for the entirety of the day may place unmanageable strain on already-tenuous shared housing situations and thus accelerate entry into an over-burdened shelter system at a particularly difficult time for the City.

Finally, the Regional Enrichment Centers must be able to accommodate the children of shelter staff along with the children of first responders, healthcare workers, and transit workers. Shelter staff are essential employees; those who lack alternative sources of child care must be able to

continue to work so that City shelters can maintain fully operational for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We appreciated your statement that the Regional Enrichment Centers will serve “our most vulnerable student populations.” We also recognize that the DOE’s new document on Regional Enrichment Centers states: “As we move forward we will seek to include additional other essential service providers and children in shelter.” However, with remote learning going into effect next week, families who are homeless and shelter staff need to know with certainty that their children will have access to the Regional Enrichment Centers when they open next week.

Access to a quality education is imperative if young people are to have any chance at breaking the cycle of homelessness. We strongly urge you to ensure students who are homeless are able to attend the Regional Enrichment Centers while schools are closed beginning next week.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for the Homeless

Committee for Hispanic Children & Families

Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

Gateway Housing

Good Shepherd Services

Homeless Services United

The Legal Aid Society

New Destiny Housing

New York Junior League

Win