

Good afternoon Chairman Parsons and members of this distinguished commission. My name is Michael Mulgrew and I am the President of the United Federation of Teachers. I commend Governor Cuomo for his leadership and commitment to provide a quality education for every child in our state and I thank the commission for the opportunity to testify before you today.

When the UFT last testified before this body in July, former UFT Vice President Leo Casey articulated a strong case for educating the whole child from pre-school through college and he stressed the need for preparing educators to develop their craft throughout their careers. I'd like to deepen the conversation on these issues and explain why we're forcefully advocating for specific policies that help children and support teachers.

Our union has lobbied vigorously for a strengthened teacher evaluation system and I will offer some insight on why we feel so convicted about this issue. I'd like to connect the discussion about increasing college readiness to what we've seen work in Career and Technical education and why we need to redouble our efforts to increase guidance counseling in our schools. I also want to talk about the role of curricula, its importance in raising the bar on our education standards and why it is critical that we start with sound early childhood education. I will conclude by urging your support to transform our schools into true community learning and support hubs, especially those with the greatest need.

### **Developing a framework for teaching**

The UFT is a union of professionals and we're passionate about teaching. It's incredibly hard work and it's immensely rewarding. We've worked hard for the past two years to introduce a comprehensive new teacher evaluation system because we believe it strengthens our profession. The teacher evaluation process should really be about making teachers better. It's why we've struggled to finalize a system that's not centered on high stakes tests. And it is why we can't support a structure that is fundamentally punitive and only concentrated on rooting out bad teachers. It's why we led the effort to adopt the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Danielson's layered approach is a more careful assessment of teacher performance and developmental needs across a range of competencies that, when taken together, produces strong teachers.

Equally important, we believe we are all accountable. Currently, we're undergoing vigorous negotiations with the Department of Education (DOE) and will make every effort to close the gap on our issues at the earliest possible date.

### **College readiness – expanding the role of guidance counseling**

While the administration has intensified its efforts to increase graduation rates, educators have become increasingly concerned about whether our graduates are truly college ready. Preparing our students for college and careers beyond high school is central to our mission as pre-K – 12 educators. College ready students are educated in schools with high instructional standards that are aligned to strong curricula. They are supported by professionals who offer programs and give them the resources that meet their developmental needs – academic and social.

In our view, guidance counselors play a pivotal role in ushering our students through the demands of getting ready for college. Guidance counseling works in concert with placing students on a more intense trajectory toward college and career. Yet over the years in our city, the ranks of guidance counselors have decreased while their caseloads have increased. Concurrently, the administration has burdened guidance counselors with data and paperwork demands. This diminishes their ability, among other supports, to have those in-depth conversations about college preparation prior to the anxiety producing college admissions process. We support the recommendations in Comptroller John Liu’s recently released report, “The Power of Guidance: Giving High School Students the College Counseling They Need.” This is not to ignore that guidance counselors help our students in other important ways. They are instrumental in working with at risk students, crisis intervention, helping students return from suspension, among the many fundamental services they provide.

The UFT strongly urges this commission to support increasing the number of guidance counselors in our schools and allow them to do what they’re trained to do – counsel students. This will go a long way toward preparing them for college. For us educators, this is a no-brainer.

College readiness programs like the City University of New York’s (CUNY) College Now have made a powerful difference in students’ preparation and should be expanded throughout our public middle and high schools. Students in over 300 middle schools and high schools are offered remediation and college credits through the CUNY system in the College Now program. Research demonstrates that College Now participants accumulate more credits in their first year at CUNY and have higher third-semester retention than DOE graduates who did not participate.

One area where we have clear evidence that college readiness programs work is in the CTE programs in NYC. The evidence shows that Career & Technical Education (CTE) graduates are more college ready and prepared for their chosen career path compared to their peers who do not have access to these courses. There are two important things we can do: we can incentivize school districts across the state to develop more CTE programs but these programs cannot be burdened with accountability measures that give them no credit. But across the state, these students face tougher challenges, especially as it relates to the Regents exams. The graduation process for CTE students is complicated by their having to complete their career specialty certification in addition to the state education department requirements to satisfy Regents tests. Recognizing the industry certification tests and all of the extra course work that students do should be incorporated into their graduation criteria.

### **Strengthened standards is not a substitute for sound curricula**

Our union sat at the table with the framers of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), so it should come as no surprise that we wholeheartedly endorse them. But we must emphatically deliver the message to you today that standards are not curricula. School districts must supply teachers with curricula geared to the new Common Core. And we are particularly concerned about how teachers will be able to prepare their students for the re-tooled statewide standardized tests this spring. It’s not that these statewide tests aren’t geared to the CCSS – they are. But the teachers don’t have the curricula to prepare students for these tests. We are setting the children and their teachers up for falling short of the

mark, without an insistence on delivering the curricula right now. And the clock is ticking. This is especially true in K-5 mathematics.

### **Cementing a solid foundation for learning begins in the early years**

Your commission may be familiar with the Family Child Care Provider chapter within the UFT. We began organizing over 20,000 providers in 2005 because we were committed to early childhood education and we believed that these care givers needed the resources and the supports of professional educators.

Our provider chapter with the support of the UFT Teachers Center and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is trying to help address the deficits that many of our kids have by the time they reach kindergarten by bringing good early childhood education even before pre-k. This is why we champion the Successful Beginning for Early Literacy Development (SBELD) model. The SBELD is an innovative model designed to deliver literacy curricula to children under 4 and to support home day care providers in building the strong foundation children need for successful transition into pre-kindergarten (pre-K) and future academic achievement. Adapted from an existing successful literacy program for early learners, the provider chapter is working closely with our members to roll out this program in a home setting.

Family Child Care Providers are in the process of implementing four to six week theme-based units of study. Some providers have selected to take on leadership roles as coaches to support colleagues with the implementation of the curricula. Through the support of the coach, providers have been successful in deepening knowledge and skills in early literacy including oral language development and implementing developmentally-appropriate instructional practices.

### **Let's get to work**

I've raised a number of concerns and recommended policies and programs where we seek the commission's support. We need to provide even greater investment and support for the college ready programs, Career and Technical Education, guidance counselors and early childhood education. Expanding CTE programs requires more business partnerships like we have with Cisco, IBM, Cablevision and Apple. Now is the time to create incentives for businesses to invest in CTE partnerships. We need to pressure the city administration to engage in the hard work of developing the curricula aligned with the CCSS, so that the students will gain deeper knowledge and will be successful on the upcoming tests. And the "gotcha" approach to evaluating teaching professionals must give way to meaningful assessments.

### **Support community schools**

I also want to emphasize, in this brief time that we have together today, what we believe can be tackled right here and now to help our children succeed.

You have heard about the community schools pilot that the UFT is co-sponsoring with the New York City Council and The Partnership for New York City – in concept. But let me share our personal story

about this journey, so you can better understand our action plan for increased family, parental and community engagement.

At a gathering of educators in Washington, D.C., in 2011 I met some folks from Cincinnati who brought a fresh approach to creating community schools and evidenced a level of commitment by the stakeholders that surpassed any model I had seen executed anywhere.

Ten years ago the manifestation of Cincinnati's child and family poverty had a horrific impact on its schools. As the principal of Oyster High School, Craig Hockenberry describes, his school was in academic emergency. They had serious mental health issues including students with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and clinical depression. The children were suffering from diseases like measles, mumps, tuberculosis – in his words – “diseases he thought were eradicated 60 years ago.” Families lacked employment and children were hungry. Equally alarming, they were a “K-8 school and 85.9% of kids never made it to a 10<sup>th</sup> grade seat.” While this is one principal's tale, the story was not unique in high poverty district schools.

The Cincinnati's public schools were in crisis. Sixteen of Cincinnati's 52 schools were in academic emergency – the most severe rating prior to school closure. The graduation rate was 52%. Today, thanks in part integrating effective health and social services into the schools, the graduation rate has risen to 82% and the system has moved from academic emergency to “academic watch” to “continuous improvement” to “effective.” And as of 2010, it's the only urban district in the state with that distinction.

The Cincinnati Public School district together with the Community Learning Institute, the city's teachers union and members of the business and non-profit sectors came together. They asked hard questions. What services will help the children? Do they suffer from chronic illnesses? Do they need eye care? Are they hungry? Are they tempted by gangs? Do their parents need housing? Do they speak the language? Do they need intervention from social workers or psychologists? It was not about a blame game. It was about uncovering any impediment to learning and addressing it right in the school. Children need to be ready to learn. Cincinnati got it. They knew that the resources were available; they just weren't necessarily accessible or aligned to the needs at individual schools.

When I look at New York City, its struggling schools in high poverty neighborhoods I arrive at a similar conclusion. Why do we have resources over there – when the need - the kids and the families arrive here at our schools every day?

How did they do it? It wasn't easy. What we believe is the critical element, these services and programs were based on a self-sustaining business model. The schools provide the space, the infrastructure and the clients. The service providers structure their billing and reimbursements outside of the school budget. Irrespective of year-to-year budget fluctuations or changing administration priorities, the community schools continue to flourish.

It took more than ten years for Cincinnati to bring its vision to reality throughout its school system. Why? In Cincinnati's case, government was the impediment. Inch by inch the local proponents had to implement their plans entirely from the bottom up. We have the opportunity in New York to move at a far faster pace and create a unique model where the state government leads – from the governor to the

education commissioner and beyond. The state could facilitate the public private partnerships and incentivize the local schools to do the necessary work to accomplish what we know is best for children. New York can do better. We ask that you recognize the urgency and make community schools a statewide education priority.

As we've mentioned repeatedly: community schools have been organized and continue to operate in our city. But when members from the union viewed the Cincinnati community learning center model in action, we experienced a collective "aha" moment that influenced our thinking. We at the UFT decided we needed to commit ourselves to creating a program based on these core principles. We convinced the New York City Council Speaker, Christine Quinn and the head of the Partnership for NYC, Kathryn Wylde that we needed to urgently bring this model to city schools. We issued an RFP and selected six schools across the city to participate in a pilot to see how we could translate Cincinnati's experience for our own children.

I'm fresh off a trip to Cincinnati where our co-sponsors and partners, teams from each of our pilot schools, the state's education commissioner and other officials saw first-hand what is possible when all vested stakeholders are serious about doing whatever it takes to care for children and help them learn and succeed.

We saw medical clinics with multiple equipped examination rooms and staffed by physicians, nurse practitioners and operating inside schools. Our visit coincided with the opening of the first full-service vision clinic in a district public school in the nation. State-of-the-art and dedicated to helping students see better so they can learn better – I wish each of you could see it.

We witnessed a mental health nursery serving babies and toddlers. We toured the food bank where children receive non-perishable food to take home that includes a year-round food program. They even operate a Kid's Café with hot dinner served nightly to the athletes and after-school program attendees. Some schools are open as late as 10 in the evening with services for families and access to computers for students who don't have them at home. These services continue during holidays and over the summer. To paraphrase one of the leaders, mental health problems don't take a summer vacation.

We believe in this. Our union is committing its personnel and UFT buildings to support all of the schools. We've lined up partners like Lutheran Hospital Group, the Food Bank for New York, the STRIVE network, Helen Keller International for eye care, the Road Runners for health and fitness support and convincing other members of the business and non-profit sectors to come on board. We've seen this model bring all of the facets together and work for families, business, educators and the community. This brings people to a place where they haven't been before. New York is not Cincinnati. Fifty-two schools aren't directly comparable to 1,700. We're not blind to the difficulties. Our mind is fixed on meeting the needs. Cincinnati represents what's possible when we park egos and the bureaucracy at the curb. The passion and energy inspired us. We invite the members of this commission to become believers. We ask you today to help us create the New York model for our students. We need to do this and we need to do it now. And in the process New York will become a beacon for the rest of the country in truly educating the whole child. Thank you.