

New York Education Reform Commission

Bank Street College

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**New York State Federation
of School Administrators**

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Good Afternoon, Chairman Parsons, Assembly member Nolan, Senator Flanagan, and other distinguished members of the Commission. My name is Peter McNally and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA). NYSFSA is a federation representing the administrator unions in three of the big five cities: Buffalo, Yonkers and New York City. I want to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on issues that NYSFSA believes the Commission should consider including in its preliminary recommendations to the Governor in December 2012.

Teacher and Principal Evaluation

The teacher and Principal evaluation system was enacted (3012c) hastily in 2010 in an effort to bolster New York's application for Race to the Top funding. The implementation of the evaluation systems has been slow and difficult for many reasons including the unknown State value added formula (first 20%), and developing Student Learning Objectives or other measurements for the 20% or 40%. We believe in accountability and our Local One in NYC has been a pioneer in this field for over five years. We continue to raise the question of accountability for superintendents and school boards. Shouldn't the people at the top of the education pyramid be evaluated and held publicly accountable as well? As we begin to fully implement the new evaluation system to hold Principals and teachers accountable, let's be sure we also demand an accountability system for those who have authority over their instructional, budgetary, personnel and student placement policies, the superintendents and school boards. The Principal is the leader of a school and research shows that an effective Principal contributes significantly to the achievement of ALL students in his/her school. The fact remains that many decisions and policies are made above the level of the Principal. These variables impact the school community and could affect the outcomes of the evaluation system. Superintendents and now private entities, Education Partnership Organizations (EPOs) are by law responsible for our schools but are **currently not** publicly evaluated and accountable for their decisions and work. In NYC, EPOs were awarded the responsibility of administering eleven schools in school year 2011/2012. During that year, it was determined that some schools should be closed. A legal battle followed and that decision was overturned. Now in school year 2012/ 2013, the same schools are being recommended to close (even though some have shown value added improvement by NYC progress reports). What type of evaluation will be done to assess the effectiveness of contracted EPOs whose schools are still on the path to being closed? Why must thousands of students and their families continue to suffer poor self esteem and confusion over the future fate of their school communities?

Superintendents and EPOs are responsible for providing Principals with Professional Development, resources, policies and supports needed to succeed as the instructional leader of a school. NYSFSA strongly advocates that if accountability is the mantra of this state and its education department then it MUST be from the top down.

Oversight of Early Childhood Education

Over the past several years, NYSFSA has advocated for NYS to place more of an emphasis on early childhood education. One of the most critical components of closing the achievement gap

is improved access to affordable HIGH Quality early childhood education. NYS has long focused on day care, a system for providing child care to allow parents to work or study, and contribute to society. It is time for the state to shift its focus to better prepare these children for success in school. As stated in the New York State Education Department (NYSED) memo dated 10/1/2012, "a cost benefit analysis conducted for NYS demonstrates that investing in prekindergarten results in reduction of grade repetition and the need for special education services. These reductions, along with other increased learning benefits, offset 41% to 62% of total spending on primary grade education, which translated to a savings of between 1.9% to 2.8% of total NYS education expenses." The latest endorsement for early childhood education came from Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, during the Children's Defense Fund national conference in July. He said "Very few alternative investments can promise that kind of return [10 percent or higher]." NYSFSA believes that the way the state currently regulates and oversees these programs allows them to become babysitting operations rather than genuine educational experiences. The problem is exacerbated because there are too many state agencies and entities with differing philosophies responsible for various aspects of child care. Last year a meeting was convened to discuss a federal early childhood grant and more than twelve commissioners and their staffs were involved.

- The New York State Education Department oversees nursery schools, Pre Kindergarten and Kindergarten.
- The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is charged with regulating and Department of Health (DOH) oversees the Early Intervention program providing services to treat developmentally delays in children from birth to age 3.
- The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) administers child care subsidies for low income families and families receiving temporary assistance.

Each of these agencies has its own regulations and rules that may provide oversight for the various needs of children in child care settings. However, they do so without one overarching goal or holistic purpose. NYSFSA has long advocated that the state conduct a study of the current aspects of early childhood education to determine the feasibility of consolidating and streamlining oversight of this system. When we remove duplication of effort and opposing views, we will strengthen the day care system so that it can become high quality early childhood education programs. NYSFSA believes it is time for NYS to merge the various entities overseeing child care into a unified structure that provides a focused, streamlined and resource efficient system that improves the care and access to quality early childhood programs.

Other states have already done this successfully. Massachusetts and Maryland have merged programs charged with overseeing early childhood education into one entity to ensure that all policies and procedures not only focus on health and safety, but as important, on educational preparation. NYSFSA urges the Education Commission to consider this type of improvement as part of their recommendations on education. Doing so will help to ensure that ALL children will be closer together at the starting line for their school career and their race to the top.

Recruitment and Retention of School Leaders

As you have traveled around the State, you've heard some groups advocate for the elimination or "reform" of the Triborough amendment. Elimination of the Triborough amendment has been touted as the magic solution to district's financial problems. We must caution you that abolishing the amendment has ripple effects. While most of our members are public servants with a passion for the work they do, we know that the working conditions and benefits help keep them in the system rather than flee for the private sector where salaries are often more attractive. Without the security of knowing that their benefits and salaries would continue after a contract expires, the incentive to remain is greatly diminished. Public employees should not be subjected to the politics of the moment or the motives of one administration in a short term of office. Stability in school leadership with a high level of accountability is crucial at this time in our school systems. Investment in developing the leadership and inspiring and recruiting future leaders to positions that are respected professionally and financially should be the goal of this Commission.

Conclusion

I thank the Commission for this opportunity to give testimony on behalf of School Leaders in our great state. I hope you will take them into consideration as you make your recommendations to the Governor.