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School Administrators Association of New York State Testimony Regarding "Teacher and Principal Quality"

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Good afternoon Chairman Parsons and honorable members of the New NY Education Reform Commission. My name is James Viola and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). On the behalf of our association's more than 7,000 members across the state, I am grateful for the opportunity to meet with you here today to share testimony and discuss important considerations in regard to teacher and principal quality. Given the constituency that I represent, the preponderance of my remarks will be directed to school principals.

Local Control – New York State has a long history of "local control." This educational cornerstone means that each school district, through its administrative team and board of education, should have primary control in setting academic priorities, determining services and programs, and ensuring the quality of its educational services and personnel. Over recent years, important federal and state initiatives have been implemented, or attempted, to significantly diminish local control. In drafting our state's educational blueprint for the future, the Commission must address the foundational consideration of the extent to which educational services and programs, and their attendant costs, should be prescribed by the State. It is our recommendation that local control should be continued and reinforced. The state and federal roles should be focused on setting academic standards and targets, not determining local procedures and services.

Recruitment – An important step toward ensuring that the "best and the brightest" enter the field of public education and ascend to administrative ranks is to enhance the public perception of education. Nobody wants to enter a career of which they cannot be proud. But sadly, we are at a time when publicly "bashing" teachers and school administrators is accepted and even modeled by state leaders. This perception, coupled with reduced pension benefits and ever increasing job demands, has a chilling effect on individuals' desiring to make the very substantial financial and personal investments that are required to be a public school administrator. For example, despite escalating academic requirements year-to-year, high school graduation rates have improved every year for the past five years, but rather than extending congratulations, the emphasis tends to be more placed on the limited numbers of students meeting aspirational performance goals. We recommend a "balanced" depiction of our educational system that is as attuned to recognizing achievements as it is areas needing improvement.

School District Budgets - Priority Setting and Professional Discretion – SAANYS is grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Mr. Schwartz and others in the Governor's office over the past two years to identify state planning and reporting requirements that may be reduced or eliminated. Sadly, in the work lives of school administrators over the past two years, there has been a net increase of such requirements with little or no additional aid to support their implementation. For example, the allocations received by most school districts under *Race to the Top* (RTTT) fall far short of the actual funding needed to implement its requirements. (Forty percent of school districts receive less than $10,000 per year.) Rather than provide local tax burden relief, it has exacerbated the burden. In that the RTTT reforms have been incorporated in state law or regulation, they dictate where the "first dollars" are spent. School funds must be directed to implement common core curriculum, to implement Annual Professional Performance Review procedures, and computer-based assessment before they are used for advanced placement programs, arts programs, or kindergarten. School administrators are restricted from implementing the programs, services and interventions they feel are most strategic because they must implement the state reforms that are mandated. The state agenda is the priority; local priority setting and local control are more and more becoming second tier considerations. Any action by the Commission to meaningfully reduce unnecessary and unfunded mandates for schools will be helpful. At the very least, action should be taken to prevent the establishment of additional mandates in the future.

Personnel Resources – Priority Setting and Professional Discretion – Personnel resources are finite and shrinking. Over the past three years, administrative positions have been cut 7.5 percent and teacher positions have been cut 4.3 percent (Source: The Council of School Superintendents, October 2011), and it is expected that further reductions will be implemented for the 2012-13 school year. In that the education reforms established under *Race to the Top* have been incorporated in law and regulation, there is correspondingly increased administrative responsibility, much of which is related to record keeping and reporting. School administrators are not able to direct their time and staff time in the manner they feel most strategic to improve educational performance, but in a manner that will ensure completion of state determined priorities.

Targeted Support for School Administrators -- The volume and complexity of work for school leaders continues to grow. More than ever before, it is essential to capitalize upon the deep experience of veteran, successful school administrators in mentoring or coaching new administrators and administrators wishing to improve. Support and incentives should be made available for this process and relationship of ongoing support. It has been demonstrated to be effective in building individual and team capacity, and in developing competency and self-awareness. Such a system, grounded in research and experience, is strongly recommended as a means to enhance the quality of school administrators. Little of the RTTT funds have been devoted to school leadership across the state in all districts.

Defining and Measuring Quality – Part and parcel of New York State's obligations under the *Race to the Top* program is the establishment of a statewide Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) system. Though the APPR system was established in Education Law in May 2010, due to court challenge, subsequent changes in law and regulation, and the sporadic release of information by the State Education Department, school districts did not know the full and final requirements that needed to be collectively bargained and built into their APPR Plans until March 2012. The system includes four quality ratings (highly effective, effective, developing and ineffective) for teachers and principals, along with voluminous and complex procedural requirements to be completed for each educator. The APPR system is unpiloted and untried in New York State and therefore, questions remain: Are these the right ratings

and definitions of quality? Will the system yield evaluation scores and ratings that are valid and reliable? To what extent should the evaluations be released? It is therefore recommended that an objective evaluation of New York State's APPR system be completed. In addition to quality rating considerations, the study should address the extent to which the system is cohesive, results in targeted professional development, supports improved student performance, and impacts upon school district and BOCES budgets.

I thank you again for the opportunity to meet with you today. I hope that this testimony will be helpful. We respect and appreciate the seriousness of the charge placed upon you to re-envision our state's system of education. We will remain available to confer with you and assist you in any way we can.

Respectfully submitted,

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