



SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Written Testimony of Laura Kelley, Chief Academic Officer
Syracuse City School District
New NY Education Reform Commission
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Good Afternoon. My name is Laura Kelley and I am the chief academic officer for the Syracuse City School District.

Syracuse is taking significant steps to transform teaching and learning to implement the rigor of the Common Core State Standards. By focusing our district on the heart of instructional transformation—the instructional core—we are positioning our district to realize high expectations for every child.

To better prepare our teachers for the demands of the Common Core, we are engaged in efforts to provide tiered, targeted professional development aimed toward increasing our deep knowledge and mastery of content, curriculum and pedagogy. Ongoing, job-embedded coaching and training is planned for all of our schools as we roll out the Common Core.

We are also looking for help from our colleagues in higher education. We support SED in linking student achievement data to schools of education and the commitment to increase accountability for teacher preparation. The state must also strengthen the standards for admission into teacher preparation programs. We encourage the state to consider alternative pathways to teaching. Studies have shown there is a positive correlation between alternatively prepared teachers and increased student achievement. We are asking the state to expand alternative options, such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project, beyond New York City.

The most critical component of the instructional core—our students—are better able to access content and engage with curricular activities as a result of multiple efforts to support their readiness to learn. Through our Breakfast in the Classroom program, afterschool and summer learning opportunities, classroom tutors, college scholarships, mentoring and other social and emotional support services, we provide services to create positive learning experiences for all of our students.

In order to work as efficiently and effectively as possible, however, the entire district infrastructure must be improved to manage the implementation of new accountability and teacher and principal evaluation systems. One of the biggest challenges cities face is integrating the new teacher and principal evaluation systems into the larger context of our transformation work. Our new systems will tell us where teachers fall on a continuum of effectiveness, yet we are still unable to make retention decisions based on performance. Once fair systems of evaluation that provide accurate and credible information regarding teacher performance are implemented, it is imperative that we move quickly to abolish LIFO, a practice that places the needs of adults before those of students. This requires eventually amending current law, allowing for needs-based hiring and performance-based retention.

We also urge the creation of matching funds for cities and counties that establish scholarship endowments. Syracuse is leveraging more than 11 million dollars in private money for college scholarships but could attract more funding and serve more students if the state were to financially support this effort. The state also should consider the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program to

help students pay for early college high school programs, and to cover enrollment in summer school initiatives like Syracuse's summer Student Success Academies. These programs help reduce the cost of developmental education in colleges.

I appreciate this opportunity to share our work and our plans for the future.