Testimony

New York Education Reform Commission

SUNY Orange County Community College

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The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators
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Good Afternoon, Chairman Parsons, Assemblymember Nolan, Senator Flanagan and other distinguished members of the Commission. My name is Ernest Logan and I am President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). CSA is the labor union representing the 6,100 active and 9,000 retired New York City public school Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Administrators and Supervisors as well as nine charter schools in New York City. CSA is also the collective bargaining unit for Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Early Childhood Education Centers. I want to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on issues that CSA believes the Commission should consider including in its preliminary recommendations to the Governor in December 2012.

Oversight of Early Childhood Education

Over the past several years, I have advocated the need for New York State to place more of an emphasis on early childhood education. One of the critical components of closing student achievement gaps is improved access to affordable high quality early childhood education. New York State 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 the focus to preparing children for success in school.CSA believes that the way the state currently regulates and oversees these programs determines whether they become babysitting operations or 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.

- 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 overseeing regulated child care centers and programs from birth to age 13.
- The New York State Department of Health (DOH) oversees the Early Intervention program providing services to treat developmental 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.

CSA worked closely with the legislature to secure passage of Senate Bill 56050 /Assembly Bill 7591-C, sponsored by Senator Flanagan and Assemblymember Nolan. This bill, which was recently signed into law by the Governor requires the Commissioners of the New York State Department of Education (NYSED), the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and the Office of Children and Family Services (NYOCFS) to identify and review existing standards, guidelines and criteria for education, development or learning in programs under its jurisdiction for children from birth to age five, including day care centers. As part of this review, NYSED, NYOCFS and NYSDOH are required to identify all their standards, guidelines and criteria, and determine where they are aligned and where they are not. By June 30, 2013 a report of the review shall be submitted, including recommendations regarding the alignment of standards, guidelines and criteria for education or learning among the programs under the jurisdiction of NYSED, NYOCFS and NYSDOH.

While this law takes New York in the right direction to ensure a child's school readiness regardless of the setting in which he receives early childhood education, I continue to push the dialogue forward and call for a review of the oversight and regulatory infrastructures. An earlier version of the bill signed into law (S5650-B/A7591-A) required NYSED, NYOCFS, NYSDOH and the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA) to conduct a study of the current early childhood education systems and directed the agencies to examine the possibility of consolidating oversight of all day care services from birth to age 5 within the State Education Department or a new agency with a focus on early childhood education. It is our belief, that it is time for New York State to merge the various entities overseeing child care into a single entity or structure, to provide a focused, streamlined and resource-efficient system for oversight and regulation of early childhood education.

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:

- In 2005, Massachusetts merged the two agencies responsible for overseeing child care in the state and created the "Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care," overseeing early education and after-school services, as well as financial assistance to families.
- Also in 2005, Maryland merged entities to create the "Division of Early Childhood Development" within their State Department of Education.

CSA urges the Education Commission to consider this type of improvement as part of their recommendations on education. Doing so will go a long way in fulfilling the directive in Executive Order No. 44, to ***"to make recommendations regarding ways to increase educational productivity and student performance in New York State."***

Teacher and Principal Evaluation

In order to bolster New York's application for Race to the Top funding, a teacher and Principal evaluation system was enacted **(3012c)** in 2010. The implementation of the evaluation system has generated much publicized controversy, mainly because the evaluations were disproportionately based on a solitary test, which is unfair to educators and students, and violates the letter and spirit of the evaluation law. Furthermore, ever since the evaluation system was first contemplated, I have raised the question of the "missing link" of responsibility: What about superintendents and school boards? Shouldn't the people at the top of the education pyramid be evaluated, too? As we begin to 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 and budgetary decisions: superintendents and school boards.

The Principal is the leader of a school, but there are many factors beyond her/his control, which impact their ability to provide high quality education. For example:

- Policies regarding district resources and placement of students are set by the Local Education Agencies (LEAs/school districts) and not by the Principal. These policies are a critical factor in a school's performance and no one is being held accountable for them. Or, worse, the Principal is being held accountable but has no control over them.
- Superintendents are ultimately responsible for providing Principals with professional development, resources and supports needed to succeed as the instructional leader of a school. How will New York State hold a Superintendent accountable for failing to provide a Principal with the necessary professional development and supports needed to succeed?

Until we hold superintendents and school boards to the same standard as Principals, we will not have true accountability.

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 districts' financial problems. I must caution you that abolishing the amendment has ripple effects. While most of my 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 benefits and salaries would continue after a contract expires and a new contract is under negotiations the incentive for educators to remain in public service would be significantly diminished.

In the fall of 2011, CSA conducted a survey of members to find out how they feel about their jobs and security. A similar member survey was done in 2009. Survey findings demonstrate that 48% of Principals, Assistant Principals or Education Administrators were dissatisfied with their jobs in 2009 and that the number had grown to 59% two years later. More alarming: Among Principals, the rate of dissatisfaction was 68% in 2009 and 73% two years later. Principals indicated that they were most concerned about three factors: Workload, wages and job security. I share these numbers with you today because I want our school system, the largest in the nation, to survive and thrive.

We must maintain salaries commensurate with school leaders' level of responsibility and accountability. And we must make certain that school leaders are evaluated respectfully and fairly, by the many measures that truly reflect the scope of their professional position. CSA's apt motto is that great schools begin with great leaders.

Professional Development

To retain good school leaders today and recruit good ones tomorrow, we must provide the resources that allow them to succeed. As educational standards continue to evolve and rise in New York State and with the implementation of the new teacher and Principal evaluation system, professional development will play a vital role.

Every school leader shares the responsibility for his or her own professional development especially in this era in which busy school leaders need to be and give their best. Professional development provides

the new tools leaders need, such as preparing for the Common Core State Standards, or to use technology to work smarter, or to assess and develop leadership skills.

A number of years ago, CSA created the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), a not-for-profit professional development institute designed to deliver practical, relevant and essential PD for today's school leaders. ELI provides standards-based, results-driven training to help school leaders successfully fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders. Behind our mission is this premise: Each school has a unique culture, a synthesis wrought from the different communities of people who work in and attend the school. A school leader integrates these constituencies into a harmonious, effective school with engaged, achieving students. Our programs give school leaders the tools they need to create true learning communities.

Since 2002, we have trained hundreds of school leaders to better manage the day-to-day activities at schools as well as in the overarching theories and practices that govern education. We provide one-on-one mentoring, small workshops, large seminars and daylong programs. New York State must invest in more of this kind of high-level training and support in order to ensure that Principals, teachers and students succeed.

Conclusion

In this testimony, I have touched upon four issues that are currently of paramount concern to school systems throughout the state. I strongly urge the New York Education Reform Commission to consider these issues when you present your recommendations to the Governor. In order to close student achievement gaps and ensure that all students are provided a sound basic education, New York State must ensure that all children have access to high quality early education and not just daycare, that the education system holds superintendents and school boards accountable for their performance and not only the Principals and teachers, elimination of the Triborough amendment may potentially endanger the recruitment and retention of high performing school leaders, and that school leaders are provided with professional development to not only improve their chances of success, but the chances of the teachers and students in their school building.

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