



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CITY-AS-SCHOOL

Fred Koury Campus

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Governor Cuomo and members of the Education Reform Commission:

I thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning about one of the most pressing issues of our day: the future of our education system in the State of New York. As one of the few teachers and school leader speaking today, it would of course be a fallacy to think that I speak for all others in those positions. I can only offer you the modest story of one school's success in spite of systemic obstacles, a story that parallels the lives of those who attend it.

The school that I call home is City-As-School High School, incongruously located in the West Village of Manhattan. Don't let the location fool you: the mission of the school is to serve students who have not succeeded in their previous schools. To put it bluntly, City-As-School is often considered the last stop before the end of the line on the journey to being a high school dropout. Our 700 students consist of 10th, 11th, and 12th graders who have transferred from over 200 educational institutions from all over New York City and New York State. When they arrive at our door, they are already 18 or 19 years old, and we are often their third or fourth high school. Most have floundered academically. Over 10 percent of our students are homeless, living in temporary shelters, or in foster care. We work with many young mothers and fathers; they are enthused to find out that there is a daycare center onsite. Others are safety transfers—students who were verbally and physically abused at their previous schools. And for teens leaving residential psychiatric facilities and correctional facilities, we are often the first and only school to which they turn. In short, City-As is often seen as a both a safe haven and as a last chance for students who have not made it elsewhere.

The punch line is this: City-As-School has the largest graduating class of any transfer school in New York City. Over the past 40 years, CAS has graduated over 10,000 students. Our black and Latino males graduate and attend college at double the rate of other transfer schools. Our alumni include doctors, lawyers, professors, ambassadors, artists, executive chefs, and even principals of New York City high schools.

There are many aspects of City-As that set us apart from other traditional and even transfer high schools. Across the country, City-As-School is known for our unique externship program. Each of our students spends 15 to 25 hours per week at internship locations all over the City. Students select from a catalog of over 400 internship placements including NYS courthouses, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the pathology lab at Columbia Presbyterian. Through these experiences, they connect to the world beyond our school walls and learn to be active members of society.

We are obviously proud of our graduation rates and our internship program, but the most important aspect of our school is neither of those.

Three years ago, shortly after I became principal of the school, we embarked on an ambitious plan that has shifted the mission of the school. We wanted to change how we were going to hold ourselves accountable. As a staff, we agreed that the moment a student walks through our doors, we are making a Five Year Commitment to him or her. Not only will you graduate from high school, but we will do everything we possibly can to help you be successful *after* high school as well. In other words, if you

come to us at 18, we want to ensure that you have all the skills and experiences you need to be successful at the age of 23.

And when we say that we are committed to doing everything we can to help our students succeed, we really do mean *everything*. This goes well beyond the usual advising, tutoring, and scholarships. In order to remove barriers to our students' success, we are providing housing referrals for our homeless students; legal aid for those about to be evicted or deported; medical care for those who need counseling, prescriptions, or just new glasses; and alumni to serve as big brothers and sisters to mentor them through college and their first "real jobs." We do this for every child, not just to earn a few extra points for the "bubble kids"--those a few points shy of being deemed "proficient"--and not just for those we deem to be "college-bound." We're there for all of our students--not just for high school but for the years after high school as well.

This deep long-term commitment to our students is what makes us unique. Over 100 years ago, John Dewey made a strong case for the importance of education not only as a place to gain content knowledge, but also as a place to learn how to live. This is what City-As has strived to do for the past 40 years, and in our eyes, this truly reflects the ideals of public education.

Now that I have told you about all of our achievements, I am going to backtrack and say that it would actually be disingenuous for me to sit here and say that we've succeeded in doing this work. We have not. As my teachers will tell you, this is emotionally draining and physically exhausting work. As a team, we are pushing our students, and ourselves, to think beyond high school and about what it would take to overcome all of the possible barriers--a criminal record, a child, a mental illness--preventing someone from being career-ready.

The reality is that as a public school, we simply do not have the staff, time, nor financial resources to be able to support students in this way. When we began this work three years ago, we knew that we needed adolescent psychiatrists, health counselors, and legal advocates, but had no means to be able to hire them. We utilized volunteers, donors, and all possible available expertise, but we quickly realized that we cannot do this work alone. We leveraged our reputation to raise funds and to develop partnerships with non-DOE agencies and CBOs. We developed partnerships with Bellevue Hospital, CUNY, the PENCIL Partnership Program, NYU, Apple, and the NYCLU.

Our collaboration with Comprehensive Development, Inc. (CDI), an organization with a long history of working with transfer schools, has been especially beneficial. CDI enables us to provide students with free tutoring, college and career advising, and legal, medical, case management and post-graduation services. This is a level of support that is rare and perhaps unprecedented in public schools but could well serve as a model as the Commission thinks about the structure of New York's public education system.

Schools like City-As-School can provide the personal, one-to-one connections that are important for engaging, retaining and helping students address academic and social service needs. An individual school, however, cannot possibly provide the necessary diversity of experiences and opportunities to meet such a wide range of demands. However, a network of schools partnered with a strong CBO is a promising start towards ensuring the success of all of our students.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our program with the Commission.

Sincerely,

Alan Y. Cheng
Principal, City-As-School High School

Alan Y. Cheng is the principal of City-As-School (CAS), one of the oldest alternative schools in New York City. CAS is a non-traditional academic high school that serves over 700 students, ages 17-22, through highly structured internships and interdisciplinary course offerings. The school targets students who do not thrive in a traditional classroom learning environment or are at risk of dropping out of school. The school is a founding member and model school for the New York State Performance Consortium and the International Network of Experiential Programs and Schools (INEPS). Prior to becoming the principal, Mr. Cheng served City-As-School as an assistant principal, an internship coordinator, a school data specialist, and a mathematics and science teacher. In 2005, he was awarded a five-year Math for America Fellowship. Prior to becoming an educator, Mr. Cheng was a Legislative Fellow for the U.S. Senate Education Committee, where he worked on the reauthorization of NCLB and Federal Pell Grants. He has also served as a Curriculum Fellow at the Graduate School of Management at Cambridge University (UK) and as a research scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab.

Mr. Cheng holds a MS in Technology and Public Policy and a MS in Civil and Environmental Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a MA in Mathematics Education and MEd in Education Leadership from Teachers College. He is currently a doctoral candidate at Teachers College. He is also a graduate of the National IEL Education Policy Fellowship Program and the Columbia University School Law Institute. Alan received his BE in Environmental Engineering and AB in Engineering with a minor in Art History, with honors, from Dartmouth College.