

Ladies and Gentleman of the Commission, my name is Julius Martinez, and I'm here to bring one student's perspective to this public hearing. I grew up in Brooklyn, NY, the youngest of 9 children. In 7th grade, I had the chance to decide what high school to go to, but I already knew where I didn't want to go: the school where every one of my older brothers and sisters went. You see, not one of them had gone on to graduate from college, and with my mother not in the picture, I decided that a different high school would serve me better.

That decision would change the course of my life but it was the work of great teachers at that school that truly made the difference. Junior year of high school Mrs. Hamilton wanted me to strive for more even when I had already been happy with the good grades I earned in her class. With her help I was able to gain access to college level courses such as the AP and College Now program. These classes have not only taught valuable information but have allowed me to receive credit that would cost hundreds of dollars otherwise.

Another teacher Mrs. Halm-Violette also was also very influential in my life. I will never forget the moment that I was sitting in my classroom waiting to graduate high school and go on to a community college and most likely choose the same path my brothers and sisters chose. But then it happened. To this day I remember her exact words "Julius, where are you going to college?"

Not satisfied with my reply, she said, "talk to me after class." It's because of her that I'm at Buffalo State College today. This moment was so significant because it highlights how important one great teacher can impact a child's education. Any child who has ever received an education worth their salt has had a teacher like this, and of the 1.3 million students in NY too many are not as fortunate to experience great teachers believing in them. Imagine if we had entire schools full of Mrs. Halm-Violettes and Mrs. Hamiltons. We are on the cusp of something great in this state, and this commission can be the impetus for that change. We must move forward and that starts with great teachers.

I'm going to make the case for 3 specific arguments based off of my experience that will improve outcomes for students across the state. First, we need to ensure that the teacher evaluation system Governor Cuomo and union leaders put forward is implemented across the state, over any political obstacles. Second, we need to improve and expand access to college prep courses like AP and College Now that allowed me to experience the rigors of a college course before stepping foot on campus. Finally, if our standards are aligned with the Common Core standards, we will have all students on track to graduate high school college and career ready.

The new evaluation system set up by Governor Cuomo is going to be very crucial and impactful to many teachers and students. For the first time in NY teachers will be able to develop professionally from an evaluation that does not just consist of thumbs up or down, but includes multiple measures to assess a teacher's effectiveness. The research supports evaluation systems like this as capturing the whole picture of a teacher, rather than the limited snapshot we have now. We need the adults around the state, and particularly in New York City, to come to an agreement around the evaluations for the sake of students.

When it comes to college access, it's programs like AP and College Now that allowed me to be prepared for going to Buffalo State. More students need access to these programs, and for that to happen we need schools that are given adequate funding that allow for rich course offerings and the class time to teach them. There are also programs, such as Early College High Schools, which embed college courses into the program, that ought to be expanded and reinforced around the state.

Finally, once we have strong teachers in the classroom, we need rigorous standards that align with the aspirations of college-bound students. The Common Core state standards are coming, and as a state we need to do all that it takes to make sure these are implemented in a smart way, with teachers, administrators, and families being prepared to adopt them. Unless all of the stakeholders have been given the appropriate training on how to incorporate the standards into their work, this effort could fall apart in its implementation.

In conclusion, my experiences have led me to believe that if we can bolster and implement the evaluation system for teachers, broaden the scope of students who are in our AP and college prep courses along with holding ourselves to smartly implementing the common core state standards that we can come closer to closing the achievement gap and ensure a great education for all students in New York.