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Working Group on School Transformation

Good Morning,

My name is Maria C. Fernandez and I am currently the Senior Coordinator for the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and a member of the Working Group on School Transformation. The Urban Youth Collaborative is a city-wide educational justice coalition that brings together thousands of young people for New York City who attend some of the worst failing schools in the City to work on education policy reform. Since 2004, UYC has led the wave of student organizing across New York City, winning the creation of Student Success Centers in some NYC public schools, passing the Student Safety Act, and ensuring that all young people has access to an education by preserving the student metrocards. In addition, UYC has been an active player in the fight for student and parent voice in the decision-making table on education policies, equitable distribution of resource for all NYC public schools, challenging and innovative curriculum, and meaningful interventions and supports for all struggling schools.

Since 2003 the New York City Department of Education has closed 140 schools, serving large numbers of the city's highest needs students. These closed schools had higher percentage of students living in poverty, with disabilities and English Language Learners than the school system as a whole. We believe that the Bloomberg Administration's school closing policy has not and cannot successfully address the needs of the system's struggling schools and the students enrolled in them. The administration has yet to articulate a convincing rationale for why particular schools should be closed or explain why it has failed to launch effective interventions to improve schools instead of closing them. In fact, according to the recent Daily News article, the new schools that have replaced those closed schools have in fact failed thousands on NYC public school students. According to the 2012 NY State reading test scores, out of the 154 new schools opened under the Bloomberg Administration, nearly 60% had passing rates that were lower than the older schools with similar poverty rates. In addition, these new small schools showed poorer results in the City's letter grade system.

At the conclusion of the last calendar year, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform brought together different stake-holder in education to create the Working Group on School Transformation. Earlier this year, the working group released our final report, *The Way Forward: From Sanctions to Support*. In this report we highlight that the DOE has not met its responsibility to help students in the system's struggling schools and has instead exacerbated the challenges faced by many of the schools it has subsequently targeted for closing. Because of this we call for the DOE to refocus its reform efforts on a strategic intervention to improve the system's struggling schools. Our recommendations are as follows:

Strategic Intervention: A Success Initiative

The DOE should:

- constitute a Success Initiative as a pilot effort to provide targeted support to the city's struggling schools.
- identify a set of research-corroborated improvement strategies employed within the city system, as well across the country, which can be adapted by the Success Initiative schools.
- designate several high-performing city schools as professional development lab sites where teams from Success Initiative schools can observe best practices and develop their own improvement strategies.
- provide the resources and supports necessary to help the Success Initiative schools develop improvement plans and support the plans' implementation by the schools and their parent and community constituencies.
- ask an independent party to assess the progress of the Success Initiative's schools and evaluate the effectiveness of the Success Initiative effort.

Systemic Capacity Building

The DOE should:

- no longer concentrate high-needs students in struggling schools.
- develop interventions and supports to help all schools build their capacity to effectively educate high-needs students.
- define school performance standards, especially those that might require closure, and develop and implement an inspection system to provide early warnings of deteriorating school performance.
- develop interventions to aid improvement in schools whose performance is deteriorating. School teams should adapt the DOE's interventions to each school's needs, and parents and community constituencies should be included in the planning and implementation processes.

Since 2003, there has been no significant reduction in the achievement gap separating New York City's African American and Latino students from white students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing program. In 2010 the New York State Regents reported that only 13% of Black and Latino students who had entered ninth grade four years earlier were college ready compared to whites. By packing struggling schools with high-needs students and depriving those schools of the supports they need to succeed, the DOE has created conditions under which it is nearly impossible for these schools to succeed.

I urge the Governor's Commission on Education to consider our recommendation to ensure that all NYC students receive a good quality education. We need to support our students in our struggling schools, not warehouse them and leave them as collateral damage.

Thank You.