



Zakiyah Ansari

Advocacy Director, Alliance for Quality Education

233 Broadway, suite 720, New York, N.Y 10279

Schoolzin18@aol.com 212 328 9266

Good Morning, my name is Zakiyah Ansari and I'm the Advocacy Director for the Alliance for Quality Education and a mother of 8 children all of whom have graduated or are currently attending NYC public schools. Below are recommendations that parents and students want to see implemented to improve our schools.

In my testimony today I want to open up with the real story, the story that never gets told unless organizations like ours are able to peel back the many layers of fluff put out by the NYC DOE. I encourage you to take this testimony into account when you are making recommendations on the educational direction of our schools, a direction that "MUST" be different than the one we are currently going in.

I hope as a commission you will really put students first by submitting the following recommendations:

- Getting back on track to funding CFE and fulfilling the promises made to NYC public school children. You must get rid of the state aid cap. In doing this you should require districts to provide advance placement, art and music, afterschool programs, and reduce class size.
- Invest in expanding Pre-k and making it a full day program. 25 years of research on early childhood education proves that it works. Quality early childhood programs improve educational outcomes and graduation rates, increase adult income and reduce incarceration rates.
- Require districts to support low-performing schools instead of abandoning and closing them. Districts can do that by using expanding learning time as an opportunity to re-design the school day, to include more rigorous curriculum and more enrichment courses, as well as comprehensive social and emotional support services.
- The state should require real and meaningful collaboration with parents, students, educators and all stakeholders.

In 2007, the children of NYC were promised billions as a result of the 13 year Campaign for Fiscal Equity battle. A promise we believed would finally provide all students with a "sound

basic education”, a day that two of my daughters were privileged to witness. They were in the courtroom when the highest court upheld CFE and five years later as they graduated and moved on to college it has been largely abandoned. Instead, they’ve experienced the hurt in their schools from state cuts of \$1 Billion in the recent years. And the gap between high need and wealthy districts has been made worse. For instance cuts to New York City have been 2 1/2 to 5 times larger per pupil than in wealthy districts like Syosset, Scarsdale and Rye.

Meanwhile Scarsdale offers 15 AP courses, 21 arts and 28 performing arts courses, and intensive college prep process that includes annual guidance counseling and college planning starting in 9th grade. Rye offers 22 advance placemen and limits class sizes to 20 in elementary schools and 23 in middle schools. In NYC a majority of schools offer no advanced placement courses, very few enrichment courses, and many schools, especially in poorer communities, have lost arts and music programs and average class sizes are the largest they have ever been.

These educational inequities are now locked in place because the state added a state aid cap to the school aid formula in 2011.

Our children have been met with one broken promise after another. In 2002, we had a mayor who promised to close the achievement gap and dramatically increase student achievement. Mayor Bloomberg has chosen to take the direction of choice, competition, and teacher bashing, over emphasis on standardized tests, experimental reforms based in business world, pushing charters as the answer to successful schooling and top-down decision making along with closure as the basis of his school reform strategy..

Has it worked?

- In NYC, only 50% of White and Asian students are graduating high school college ready and 13% of Black and Latino students are graduating high school college ready
- More than 80% of special education students in did not meet standards
- More than 80% of English Language learners did not meet standards in the past 3 years

This is the result of the state abandoning its CFE commitment and the shortcomings of competition and overemphasis on testing.

In closing I would like to acknowledge that no one wants to see dramatic and successful change in our schools more than the students, parents and communities most impacted

The best choice is an excellent school in one's own community. We must ensure that all parents have this option; this should be the primary goal for the public school system. Sustainable school reform can only happen when there is real collaboration with stakeholders. We will be following the movements of the commission as it comes up with its recommendations. We need you to be leaders in moving education in the right direction for all students.