

OPEN LETTER TO NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION COMMISSIONER DAVID STEINER IN OPPOSITION TO A WAIVER FOR CATHLEEN P. BLACK

November 14, 2010

Hon. David Steiner
Commissioner of Education
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Commissioner Steiner:

We the undersigned concerned citizens, parents of public school students, current and former public school teachers and former public school students of New York City are outraged by the recent action of Mayor Michael Bloomberg in announcing his choice for the next Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, one Cathleen P. Black, without even having conducted a public search for the best qualified candidates. It is shocking to us that his choice, Ms. Black, appears to lack not only teaching experience but is lacking any of the educational credentials and qualifications for the appointment to the major post of a school superintendent in New York State.

Because the leader of the New York City Schools is critical to the raising of academic achievement levels of our children, and because we believe in equal opportunity as the best process for recruiting and evaluating competitive candidates for a job that deserves excellence—consistent with your own efforts to raise standards for teachers, staff and students—we respectfully and strongly urge you to hold the Mayor's appointee to the standards and qualifications set out in the statute for school superintendents. Accordingly, we urge that you deny the City's anticipated request on behalf of Ms. Cathleen Black for a waiver from these qualifications.

We stress the impropriety of there being no public search whatsoever for this top educator's position. On the very day and at the very hour that incumbent Chancellor Joel Klein's resignation was announced, Mayor Bloomberg announced Mr. Klein's successor. Hence, there was no opening that was advertised; no recruitment period for applications; and no equal opportunity process for qualified candidates of any race and both genders to apply and to be considered for this top educational post.

The fact that Mayor Bloomberg did not undertake a public search in accordance with equal employment opportunity principles in itself raises significant public policy issues, as well as the specter of cronyism. How can it be that the position of leader of one of the nation's largest school systems can be filled in such a cavalier manner—without any kind of notice or recruitment period for the consideration of capable and talented individuals—persons who are educators, who have the statutory qualifications and certification, and the requisite experience and skills to understand the best practices of pedagogy? The school superintendent for the New York City School District should have knowledge of curriculum and instruction and assessment, as well as extensive teaching experience.

At a time our school children deserve only the best qualified people at the top of the school system and throughout the ranks of the teaching, supervisory and administrative staff of our public schools, at a time minority group children in particular are not performing at grade levels much less with proficiency in core subjects, and at a time this city is mired in disputes as to the

accuracy of testing data and about appropriate educational strategies, it is especially important that we have someone at the helm who can deal with these issues with expertise and authority.

Given that the city school system is rank with systemic segregation by race and ethnicity—and Mayoral control has been sharply criticized for inattentiveness to due process, and for refusing to provide for meaningful parental involvement in decisions affecting the welfare of their children, it is even more necessary for the citizens and parents of New York City to be confident that the next Schools Chancellor is the most capable and qualified person available for the job, and that the process was open to all segments of the population and not just a crony of the Mayor.

In these circumstances, and because we are shocked and appalled that no public search for qualified candidates was even conducted, we urge you to reject the City of New York's request for a waiver for Ms. Black, thereby forcing the City to conduct a real search and to consider diverse candidates for this top educational post. That is how you got your job—and it is how the next Schools Chancellor—whoever he or she may be—should and must earn this City's top educator's post.

A nationwide search for capable candidates will undoubtedly produce qualified persons worthy of meeting the challenges of reforming the New York City public school system and capable of bringing into existence a system of high expectations and achievement for students, teachers, and staff. Excellence has to be the standard for all "stakeholders" in our school system—students, teachers, their supervisors, administrators, and school superintendents alike.

We urge you to do the right thing; reject the waiver request and give clear instructions and guidance to the City of New York that you will not consider candidates for this post that have not been recruited and vetted through a genuine search process in which all qualified applicants may be considered and evaluated on their merits.

SIGNED:

Norman Siegel, civil rights attorney
Michael Meyers, Director, NY Civil Rights Coalition
Robert Jackson, Chair of City Council Education Committee
Leonie Haimson, Executive Director, Class Size Matters and NYC public school parent
Mona Davids, President, NY Charter Parents Association
Jaye Bea Smalley, Co-President, Citywide Council on Special Education
John Englert, Co-President, Citywide Council on Special Education
Sandi Lusk, Director, Westchester Square Zerega Improvement Organization, Inc, Bronx
Luis O. Reyes, Puerto Rican New Yorker and educator
Maria Dapontes-Dougherty, former D30 President, Presidents' Council, Queens, former CPAC Corresponding Secretary
John Battis, parent, PS 15, Brooklyn, member, Concerned Advocate for Public Education
Shino Tanikawa, member of the Community Education Council District 2
Paola de Kock, Citywide Council on High Schools
Hon. Chris Owens - Member, NY State Democratic Committee, 52nd Assembly District / Former President, Community School Board 13 (Brooklyn)
Marissa and David Effman, PS 166 and MS 54 parents
Kori Goldberg - Public School Teacher
Julie Cavanagh, CAPE, GEM
Phil DePaolo, Parent, P.S. 132 and P.S. 17, Brooklyn
Lavivia Forts, public school parent, Staten Island

David Quintana, Member, Community Board 10 Education Committee Queens
 Shaun Delacy, Former teacher at Bronx High School of Science
 Julius Adams, parent
 Sean Grandits, NYC public school parent, MS 51 Brooklyn
 Juliet Luther, parent of NYCDOE student
 Jan Carr, M.Ed., public school parent and SLT Member
 Stan Baker, public school parent
 Josephine Wan, parent of college freshman and former PTA President and PA treasurer
 Ana Fernandez, parent
 Sarah Chu, former NYC public school teacher
 Ethan Lombardi, Brooklyn resident
 Teri Schlesinger, parent of two children in districts #28 and #30, Queens
 Gary Eiferman, retired NYC high school teacher
 Gary Babad, NYC Parent
 Hope L. Killcoyne, NYC public school parent
 Tamara Rowe, SLT Clinton School for Writers and Artists
 Justin Wedes, Educator, Brooklyn
 Erica Baum, New York City Public School parent
 J. Lanzetta
 Ellen Bilofsky, former NYC public school parent
 Barbara Nunziata, Parent Coordinator, Benjamin N. Cardozo HS
 Debra Freeman, member, Parent Leaders of the Upper East Side and parent at PS 77
 Joan Seedorff, NYC public school teacher
 Thomas A Dougherty, Queens Public School Parent
 Ric Brown, Parent, PS/IS 187
 Sallye L. Leventhal, NYC public school parent, Rego Park, NY
 Alison Morea, mother of four public school children
 Ann Levine, New York, NY
 Patricia Connelly, NYC Public School Parent, M.S. 51, Brooklyn & Beacon HS
 Jane Ludlam, parent of a student at the Beacon School, NYC
 Lydia Bellahcene, parent, PS 15K
 Debbie Halperin
 Kathy Wilson, Parent
 Ellen Raider, iCOPE
 Weston De Cohen, CCNY
 Shelley Grant
 Miles Chapin, Long Island City, District 2 parent
 Miriam Cutelis Ed.S, NY State certified teacher
 Warren Miner, iCope, CBID, CPE
 Donovan Santiago, Film Director, College Student
 Daniel Holt, parent at P.S. 163
 Helen Greenberg, parent at East Village Community School and Tompkins Middle School, LES
 Donna Lazarus, NYC HS teacher, UFT
 Nina Birnbaum, parent of NYC public school student
 Charlotte Phillips, M.D., for identification only: Chairperson, Brooklyn For Peace
 Zulma E. Villalba, Math Teacher/Chapter Leader
 Meryl Zukowsky
 Karen Fine, NYC Fifth Grade Teacher
 Howard J. Eagle, Community Education Task Force (Rochester, NY)
 Ann Agranoff, teacher at Queensborough Comm. College
 Lucy Koteen, President Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats
 Dr. Joy Romanski
 Audrey Doyle, Parent of Public School students

Scott Cunningham and Emily Stern, parents of students in the NYC public schools
David Galarza, National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights
Katherine Consuelo- Johnson, concerned parent of 4th grader
Janet K. Kennedy, PhD, parent of 1st grader at PS 321
Mia Barker, NYC public school parent
Susan Crawford, District 3 parent, Director, The Right to Read Project
Molly Nolan, Brooklyn For Peace
Robyn Harland, retired teacher and UFT chapter leader 4 years, district 75
Stephen Mohny
Teresa Boitel, Teacher, IS 52
Susan Metz of Green Party of Kings County (for identification only)
My linda Hull public school parent
William Patterson, 7th year NYCDOE Brooklyn High School Teacher & Small Schools
Movement Survivor
Angela Wong, NYC Public School Parent and Volunteer and Taxpayer!
Eileen Bowman
Marilyn Kaggen, teacher and parent
Teresa DeMeo, I.S. 75 PTA Treasurer, Staten Island Technical High School Parent
Keith Brooks, UFT
Susan Kramer, parent of students at The Clinton School and The Beacon School
Andres Castro, The Teacher's Voice Literary Journal Founding Editor, former teacher and
parent of two former NYC public school students
Stephina Fisher, NYC DOE Teacher, Teachers College Columbia Univ.
Gerry Griffin, NYC public school parent
Claudia H. Albert, retired educator
Thelicia Covington, Co-Founder of Queens Living Through Legacy
Eileen Tsuji
Julia Willebrand, Ed.D, Green Party candidate, NY State Comptroller
Cora Sangree, public school teacher and parent
Alexis Neider, PS 363