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To: Chancellor Walcott <DMWalcott@schools.nyc.gov>
Cc: Mariano Guzman <mguzman16@schools.nyc.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 22, 2011 9:19 PM
Subject: Comments on Contract for Excellence

The Honorable Dennis Walcott
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

We, the undersigned members of the Community Education Council District 2, wish to submit the following comments on the 2011-2012 Contract for Excellence Proposed Plan.

We have grave concerns regarding the implementation of the 2007 Class Size Reduction Plan. Justice Leland deGrasse concluded in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity suit that New York City public school students were deprived of their constitutional right to an adequate education as a result of large class sizes. The Contracts for Excellence law was thus enacted in 2007 to require the City to reduce class sizes in all grades in return for billions of dollars in additional state aid. Justice deGrasse's ruling is supported by public school parents, who have repeatedly ranked reducing class sizes as their top priority in the NYC Department of Education's Learning Environment survey. Furthermore, 86% of the New York City principals say they are unable to provide a quality education because of excessive class sizes.

The Class Size Reduction Plan of 2007 developed and issued by the Department of Education calls for average class sizes of no more than 20 in grades K-3, 23 in 4-8th and 25 in high school. However, despite receiving more than a billion dollars in total C4E funds to implement the plan, class sizes have instead risen in all grades since the plan went into effect. This year, the final year of the 5-year plan, class sizes are expected to be the largest in eleven years in the early grades. While we understand there are C4E spending categories other than class size reduction (e.g., increased time on task), the very foundation of the C4E is based upon smaller class sizes. As such, we are deeply troubled by the counter trend of increasing class sizes.

Furthermore, we are concerned that DOE's implementation of its Class Size Reduction plan has failed to adhere to the law. C4E presentations and public hearings were scheduled *after* the funds had already been allocated, making the public hearing meaningless. Perhaps more troubling, we are informed that there was a "pre-approval" process in which the DOE submitted its plan to the State Education Department before any public input had occurred. The DOE has not held borough hearings as required by law and, instead, has relied on regular CEC meetings to make its presentation. While CEC meetings are an effective means for engaging the parent community, lumping the

C4E public hearing process together with many other agenda items at regular monthly CEC meetings does not facilitate the type of robust public input needed on this important issue as compared to a stand-alone meeting dedicated to the C4E.

We call on the DOE to openly *renounce* the agreement between then-DOE Chancellor Joel Klein and then-SED Commissioner David Steiner in a letter dated February 23, 2010 (as disclosed by the NY Daily News on September 22, 2010), by which the city and state agreed to reroute monies previously allocated via the required public process and nominally agreed "contracts," and explicitly approve *increases* in class sizes, even at the city's "75 lowest-performing schools." The city and state dishonor both the letter and spirit of the Contracts for Excellence by standing by such back-room deals, the goal of which was to *renege* on the contracts. The "current economic climate" was, and remains, no excuse.

The C4E is the result of a decade-long fight to provide a high quality education for all public school children in New York City. Currently, neither the outcome nor the process of the C4E is satisfactory. We want assurances that both the City and the State will adhere to the commitments of the C4E and that they will implement the plan transparently and openly. In doing so, we urge the DOE and SED to involve the entire public school community – administrators, teachers, and parents. The CECD2 would be happy to assist the DOE in conducting outreach and holding special public hearings.

We look forward to working with you to improve this important plan.

Sincerely,

Shino Tanikawa
President

Simon Miller
First Vice President

Elizabeth Weiss
Second Vice President

Sarah Chu

Demetri Ganiaris

Eric Goldberg

Michael Markowitz

Tamara Rowe