For immediate release, October 29, 2013

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NYC PARENTS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS AND ADVOCATES SPEAK OUT AGAINST TESTING AND DATA-SHARING

BEFORE NYS SENATE HEARINGS

This morning, at a press conference at 250 Broadway in Lower Manhattan, before hearings of the NY Senate Education Committee, members of Class Size Matters, Change the Stakes, and New York State Allies for Public Education, along with elected officials and education professionals, spoke out against the way the New York State Education Department is subjecting public school students to unproven programs, excessive high-stakes testing, and privacy violations, undermining the quality of their education and putting their future prospects at risk.

Leonie Haimson, Executive Director of Class Size Matters, said: “New York is now the worst state in the country when it comes to student privacy. Commissioner King plans to share personally identifiable data from the entire state’s public school student population with inBloom Inc. and other vendors, including highly sensitive disability diagnoses, disciplinary records, and even teen pregnancy and immigrant status. Parents in NYC and elsewhere have protested this plan at every turn, and demanded the right keep their children’s data out of the inBloom database, without success. There is now a grassroots rebellion brewing among parents, school board members, and district superintendents against inBloom. We welcome the opportunity to speak to Senator Flanagan and other members of the Education Committee, to let them know that personalized learning can only come through smaller classes, not testing or data-mining our children, and to urge them to pass legislation to stop this unconscionable plan.”

"In recent years, some education officials have gotten awfully cavalier about handing over private, personal data on our kids to outside vendors and third parties seeking to use it in commercial product development," said Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan). "None of this data should ever be shared with outside vendors and third parties without the informed consent of parents, at a bare minimum. 'Big data' analysis can yield tremendous benefits, but data-sharing run amok can yield disastrous consequences as well. Protecting our kids must always come first."

Nancy Cauthen, parent of a 7th grader and a member of the group Change the Stakes says, "Education officials have justified imposing costly, large-scale and unproven reforms based on an overly-simplistic and unsubstantiated narrative about American high school graduates not being 'college and career ready.' Reasonable people can debate the pros and cons of having national standards, but we never had that debate. Instead, the push for Common Core was driven by a corporate vision of education that sees students only as future workers and public funds as a source of private enrichment."

 “Our children continue to be negatively impacted by ill-conceived education policies that have nothing to do with teaching and learning.  We must rid the school environment of the pressure of doing well on tests and bring back learning and teaching to a student’s academic level.  A student’s achievement should be measured on the totality of their school work and progress not on the scores of high stakes tests.  Only then can we develop a curriculum that truly supports to their success,” said Councilmember Robert Jackson, Chair of the New York City Council’s Education Committee.

Lisa Rudley, an Ossining parent and founding member of NYS Allies of Public Education says, “As districts in Westchester and Long Island give back their Race to the Top funds, to try to protect their children's private records from being shared with dashboard vendors, I am outraged that the state still plans to share our personally identifiable student data, including highly sensitive discipline and disability information, with inBloom Inc. This is morally reprehensible and incomprehensible not only to parents, but to superintendents, who have made their opposition to this plan known.  Six states have pulled out of inBloom or put their data-sharing plans on hold; the other two are allowing either districts or parents to opt out. It is time that the NY State Education Department do the same.”

Santos Crespo, the President of Local 372, the school aide union, says: “The Common Core Curriculum Standands created by non-educators has taken the joy out of learning for our children. The excessive testing and test prep is traumatizing our children. The violation of student privacy through schemes like InBloom designed to exploit and profit off our children must be stopped. The Regents' Reform Agenda is clearly an attempt to corporatize and privatize education. Local 372 vehemently opposes this agenda that seeks to undo Public Education and stands united with parents to ensure every child receives a high-quality, well rounded public education.”

According to Lisa Shaw, “As a parent of four children I can't sleep at night. I am so desperate to protect my children's personal information from inBloom that I am considering sending them to a private school, moving out of state, or even out of the county. My pleas to the DOE and NYSED to opt out have been ignored. I now refuse to sign any school forms, including Medicaid or school lunch forms, and encourage other parents to do the same.  If Commissioner King had his own children in a public school he might understand how I feel.”

“How do you build a baseline from last year’s poorly constructed tests--a weak foundation standing on shaky field test data?” asks Fred Smith, a testing expert and former employee of the NYC Board of Education.

Karen Sprowal, a NYC parent of a special needs child and a member of Class Size Matters, explains: “Once again the NY State Education Department has dismissed the rights of public school parents by trampling all over our children's privacy. These ‘personalized learning’ tools that inBloom intends to facilitate are experiments on public education children. No private schools are signing up for them, so I must question why my child is being subjected without my consent. Parents will not share financial information if they know that it will be shared with for-profit vendors. As a result, New York City and New York state may lose millions in Medicaid reimbursements, Title one funds and, if there are breaches, from lawsuits. We cannot allow our children to become experimental subjects in a manner that puts their future at risk.”

Ruth Powers Silverberg, Associate Professor in the School of Education at the College of Staten Island, CUNY, asks: “Am I meeting my responsibility to my students, future principals, if I don’t focus on practices designed to increase test scores? I came to the College of Staten Island to prepare school leaders with research-based approaches to school improvement: nurturing a collaborative culture with the focus on learning, and developing the supportive relationships that are the foundation of all learning and growth.  I implore the Senate Education Committee to reverse the current test-driven course so that my graduates can do this work.”

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