

August 17, 2017

Chairman Carl McCall
State University of New York Board of Trustees
353 Broadway
Albany, NY 12246

Chancellor Nancy Zimpher
State University of New York
353 Broadway
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Chairman McCall, Chancellor Zimpher and SUNY Trustees:

We write you about a matter which is of the greatest importance to the integrity of the State University of New York. At this time, proposed SUNY regulations would create a new process for teacher certification specific to charter schools with a substantially lower standard of qualification. While SUNY sets a standard that requires an undergraduate to spend two years of their studies learning their craft as a teacher, the SUNY Board of Trustees is now considering a proposal that would replace this requirement with a mere 30 hours of training. If the SUNY Board, or its subcommittee, adopts this policy, it will send a clear message that they do not value the existing SUNY requirements for a teaching degree and will undermine the value of a SUNY degree for all SUNY graduates.

Chancellor Zimpher has championed the idea “that excellently trained teachers are the number one in-school factor for student success” and promised reforms “lifting up the teaching profession and transforming the way we not only prepare – but continually support – teachers.” The new charter school teacher certification proposal would make a mockery of TeachNY and undercut SUNY’s effort to make New York teacher preparation standards a national model.

Most disturbingly, this proposal would create a two-tiered system of teacher certification: teachers whose credentials are inadequate to qualify for standard certification are now qualified for schools that overwhelmingly teach Black and Brown students. This is unacceptable. Creating a second tier of teacher certification that is less stringent for charter schools is establishing a second class education for Black, Brown and low income students. In this nation, there is a long history of reserving unequal educational opportunities for Black and Brown children. Now, the SUNY Trustees are on the verge of enacting such an unequal standard in teacher preparation. Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, New York should not be considering a proposal that perpetuates separate and unequal education for Black and Brown children.

Finally, the justification given within the proposed regulations for this policy is that charter schools have a teacher recruitment problem. This assertion is known to be factually incorrect. The issue is not recruitment, it is retention. Due to the often harsh teaching techniques and unsupportive conditions of work employed by some of the large charter chains, there are massive turnover rates. For instance, public schools have a turnover rate of 18%, while privately-run charter schools have a turnover rate of 41% and the largest charter school network, Success Academy, has a turnover rate of 60%. It is widely known that Success Academy’s political influence is the reason this policy is being proposed by SUNY now. Rather than rewarding these high teacher turnover rates by allowing Success and other charter schools to create a lower tier of teacher certification, SUNY should undertake a full investigation of exactly why it is that some charter schools have such high teacher turnover rates.

The decision to create a second tier of teacher certification for charter schools reflects upon the entire institution of SUNY and threatens the academic integrity of one of New York's greatest public institutions. The idea that this decision can be undertaken by a subcommittee of the SUNY Board of Trustees and that the Board bears no responsibility for this decision is absurd. The Board of Trustees is responsible to "govern the University" and "exercise all of its corporate powers." If this policy is enacted, it will be a SUNY policy and the full SUNY Board and its Officers will share the full responsibility.

New York State currently has some of the strongest teacher certification laws in the nation. Holding educators to a high standard is something we should embrace not run away from. We call on you and the entire SUNY Board of Trustees to tell the Charter School Subcommittee to reject the proposed regulations, and to maintain current teacher certification requirements for charter schools.

Sincerely,

Action Potluck

Advocates for Justice

Alliance for Quality Education

Badass Teachers

Bronx Educators United for Justice

Center for Children's Initiatives

Citizen Action of New York

Class Size Matters

Coalition for Educational Justice

Coalition for Public Education

Community Food Advocates

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action

Day Care Council of New York

District 6 Presidents Council and Manhattan
Borough Appointee of CEC 6

Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance

ECE Policy Works

El Puente

Erase Racism

Food Advocates

Hispanic Federation

Long Island Progressive Coalition

Make the Road New York

NAACP NY

Network for Public Education

Network for Public Education Action

New York Communities for Change

New York Immigration Coalition

New York Progressive Action Network

New York Working Families

NYCORE

Peekskill CSD PTO

Professional Staff Congress

Public School Watchdogs

Save Our Schools

SaveCPE1 Action Team

The Black Institute

The Gathering for Justice / Justice League NYC

The Power of Ten

The Schott Foundation for Public Education

True Blue NY