

May 11, 2020

BY EMAIL

Members of the New York State Board of Regents
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Re: Give Overage 12th Graders the Chance to Graduate After COVID-19

Dear Chancellor Rosa, Members of the Board of Regents, and Interim Commissioner Tahoe:

As parents, students, educators, and advocates across New York State, we are writing to urge the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents **to give students who are aging out of school this year the opportunity to return to high school for the 2020-21 school year, rather than lose their chance to earn a high school diploma.**

As you know, students in New York State have the right to work toward a high school diploma until the end of the school year in which they turn 21. Although most students graduate within four years, many students need five, six or even seven years to complete high school. Last summer, 2,722 students across New York State earned a high school diploma in their sixth year of high school.

Each of these sixth-year graduates was once considered “overage and under-credited.” Students become overage and under-credited for a variety of reasons. Many have experienced homelessness or spent time in foster care. Others have experienced court involvement; arrived in the United States as teenagers new to learning English; or dropped out of school to work to support themselves or their families. Overage students are disproportionately students of color, students with disabilities, multilingual learners and students from low-income households. For example, students with disabilities are more than three times as likely as students without disabilities to need a sixth year and Black and Latinx students are seven times as likely as White students to need a sixth year to graduate.

This school year, before COVID-19 shut down New York State high schools, another small but determined group of overage students were working hard to meet high school graduation requirements. Although educators, parents and public officials have worked diligently to create remote learning opportunities, thousands of students across New York State—through no fault of their own—have been unable to engage in remote learning or to adapt to this altered learning method, and will not be able to earn full course credits this term.

We are deeply concerned that the overage students unable to earn course credit this term will be those who are already marginalized and whose families are already being hit hardest by COVID-19: students whose families do not have access to computers or broadband internet and who are still waiting to receive remote learning devices; students living in homeless shelters or overcrowded apartments who lack a quiet spot to study; students whose days are now spent

caring for younger siblings or ill family members; students who are not receiving the same special education supports and services they typically receive at school; and immigrant students now making deliveries during the day to support their families who will not receive a stimulus check.

These circumstances are incredibly difficult for any student. But, for overage students, the consequences are dire. Without an opportunity to finish earning credits when schools reopen in 2020-21, many overage students will simply age out without a diploma, making it much more difficult for them to access post-secondary opportunities and jobs especially at a time of surging unemployment rates. When the current public health crisis subsides, these overage high school seniors need the opportunity to return to school to finish earning their diplomas and prepare for the transition to post-secondary opportunities.

We urge NYSED and the Board of Regents to issue guidance directing school districts to **allow high school students to complete work from this school year at least until the end of summer 2021 and to allow students who are aging out of school this year to return for another year, rather than lose their chance to earn a high school diploma.**

We also urge New York State to **provide per pupil funding for these students to ensure that schools and districts have the funds they need to support these young people during the 2020-21 school year.** Although this is a small group of students – estimated to be under 2,500 statewide – overage students are concentrated in transfer high schools and other alternative programs. For example, in New York City, about 1 in 4 of the currently enrolled students who will age out in June 2020 attend one of 51 transfer high schools. The State must ensure these schools have sufficient resources to give this exceptional group of young people the last chance they need to earn a high school diploma. Additionally, we urge that any such students who graduate be counted towards their school’s graduation rate for ESSA accountability purposes so that schools are recognized for fulfilling their commitment to these older students in the 2020-21 school year.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that students who would otherwise age out of school this year can return to school so they do not lose their chance to earn a high school diploma as a result of the pandemic. To discuss these recommendations further, please contact Ashley Grant, coordinator of the Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma, at 212-822-9548 or agrant@advocatesforchildren.org. We wish you and yours health and safety. Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Advocates for Children of New York

Advocates for Justice

AHRC, New York City

Alliance for Quality Education

America On Tech
ARISE Coalition
Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association
Big Picture Learning
Blueprint Supported Education
Bronx Independent Living Services
Brooklyn Community Services
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Center for the Disabled
Business Teachers Association of New York State
CAMBA
Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce
Capital Region Refugee Roundtable
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
The Child Center of NY
The Children's Agenda
Children's Defense Fund - NY
The Children's Law Center
Citywide Council on High Schools
Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE)
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)
Coalition for Homeless Youth
Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance
Community Service Society
Council for a Strong America

Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Court Appointed Special Advocates NYC
Deep Outcomes LLC
Eskolta School Research and Design
Exalt Youth
ExpandedED Schools
Families Together in New York State
The Family Advocacy Clinic, Fordham University School of Law
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Friends of Island Academy
Futures and Options
Getting Out & Staying Out
Girl Vow, Inc.
Girls for Gender Equity
Goddard Riverside Community Center
Good Shepherd Services
Graham Windham
Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute
Henry Street Settlement
HERE to HERE
Hispanic Federation
INCLUDEnyc
IntegrateNYC
Internationals Network for Public Schools
Jackson Heights People for Public Schools
JobsFirstNYC
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
Lawyers for Children, Inc.

Learning to Work Coalition
Learning Disabilities Association of New York State
The Legal Aid Society
Legal Services NYC
Long Island Advocacy Center
Mental Health Association of New York City
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
Metropolitan Russian American Parents Association
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.
New Visions for Public Schools
New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation
New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID)
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
New York Performance Standards Consortium
New York State Association for Bilingual Education
New York State Coalition of 853 Schools
New York State Community of Practice on Family, School and Community Collaboration
New York State Disabilities Advocacy Association and Network
New York State Independent Living Council, Inc. (NYSILC)
New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYTESOL)
NY Stop Grad HST
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic
NYU Family Defense Clinic
NYU Metro Center
Parent to Parent New York, Inc.
The Partnership for the Homeless
Peer Health Exchange

Queens Community House
Riverdale Neighborhood House
SCO Family of Services
Sheltering Arms
Special Education Law and Advocacy Field Clinic, Benjamin L. Cardozo School of Law
Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center
Starbridge
Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council Education Committee
Teens Take Charge
Tomorrow's Leaders NYC
United We Stand
Unity Preparatory Charter School of Brooklyn
The Urban Assembly
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Albany Field Office
YOUTH POWER!
Zone 126

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