

March 9, 2021

**BY EMAIL**

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

**Re: Giving Overage 12<sup>th</sup> Graders the Chance to Graduate After COVID-19**

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

As parents, students, educators, and advocates across New York State, we are writing to urge the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents to **give students aging out of school this year the opportunity to return to high school for the 2021-22 school year, rather than lose their chance to graduate due to COVID-19.**

As you know, New Yorkers have the right to attend school 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 need five, six or even seven years to finish high school. Last summer, over 2,200 students across New York State graduated after their sixth year of high school. We appreciate that last June, NYSED and the Board of Regents issued guidance [strongly encouraging](#) schools across the State to allow 21-year-olds to return for summer school and, if necessary, attend high school this year to complete their education. **As the pandemic rages on, we call on you to immediately extend this guidance to students aging out in 2020-21 so that no student loses the chance to complete high school because of COVID-19.**

**This is a matter of basic fairness.** Students turning 21 during the 2020-21 school year should have as much time to complete this year's coursework as their younger classmates. In the face of the incredible hardships caused by COVID-19, districts across the State have had to adjust grading policies and timetables, including giving high schoolers additional time to complete coursework required for graduation. Many students need this extra time. For example, as of January, 1 in 5 New York City high schoolers were still working to finish coursework from *last spring*; these students are disproportionately students with disabilities and multilingual learners.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, many districts have already told students that they may have through the first semester of 2021-22 to resolve incomplete grades from *this school year*. However, we are concerned that seniors who turn 21 before June 2021 may lose these opportunities if NYSED does not direct schools to, once again, allow students who have "aged out" to return in the 2021-22 school year if they need to do so to graduate and/or complete their transition goals. As Senior Deputy Commissioner D'Agati wrote last June, "It would be a cruel injustice to pull the rug out from under these young adults who have worked so hard for so long."<sup>3</sup>

**This is an equity issue; students racing against the clock to finish high school just before they age out are significantly more likely to be Black, Latinx, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners.** Even before the pandemic, Black and Latinx high school graduates were 7 times more likely than White graduates to need a sixth year to earn a diploma.<sup>4</sup> Similarly,

graduating ELLs were *six times as likely as non-ELLs* to need a 6<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>5</sup> Extending eligibility to students aging out would ensure that these students—students who come from the very same communities that have already been hardest hit by this terrible pandemic<sup>6</sup>—do not also lose their last chance to earn a diploma because of COVID-19.

**Finally, this is urgent.** Last year, because NYSED did not issue the memo about extended eligibility until June 18<sup>th</sup>, it was difficult to get information out to eligible students and families before the school year ended. This year, your immediate action would allow schools the time necessary to get the word out to students and families and to create realistic plans to help students reach the finish line. For this reason, **we ask that you immediately extend the [June 18, 2020 memo](#) to urge schools to allow students aging out this year to remain in high school this summer, and if necessary, to return in 2021-22.**

**Schools supporting 21-year-olds also need funding and accountability metrics that support and acknowledge the work they are doing to help over-age students earn their diploma and meet IEP transition goals under this policy.** This year, districts supporting students over 21 are not receiving funds to do so. As a result, many students, including students with disabilities who needed to remain in their state-approved nonpublic school, were denied the option of returning to school. We are also concerned that, without changes, schools doing this work will not receive credit in their accountability scores for over-age students who graduate during this year of extended eligibility. To support and acknowledge the important work happening at high schools around the State, **State accountability metrics should be modified to fairly recognize graduates who earn their diploma during this time of extended eligibility.** We also join the Board of Regents and the NYSED in calling on Governor Cuomo and our State legislators to pass a budget in which **schools receive all available federal COVID-19 education relief funding and that such funding supplements, and does not supplant, state support.** Federal COVID-19 relief funds should be used to address the overwhelming needs created by this pandemic, including supporting students age 21 and older, whether they attend public high schools or state-approved nonpublic schools.

**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](mailto:agrant@advocatesforchildren.org). Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

### **Organizations**

Abbott House

Advocates for Children

AHRC New York City

Alliance for Quality Education

America On Tech

ARISE Coalition  
Bailey's Cafe  
Beam Center  
Big Picture Learning  
Brooklyn Defender Services  
Brunswick CSD  
Business Teachers Association of New York  
CAMBA  
Capital Region Refugee Roundtable  
CareerWise New York  
Catholic Guardian Services  
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY  
Children's Agenda  
Children's Aid  
Children's Law Center  
Children's Village  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Chinese-American Planning Council  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York  
Citywide Council on High Schools  
Citywide Council on Special Education  
Coalition for Homeless Youth  
Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma  
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)  
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance  
Comprehensive Youth Development  
Cooke School and Institute  
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies  
CUNY Faculty for Bilingual Education  
Disability Rights New York

East Brooklyn Community HS  
EBL Coaching  
Education Advocacy Clinic, NYU School of Law  
Education Trust - New York  
Eskolta School Research and Design  
Everyone Reading, Inc.  
Exalt Youth  
ExpandedED Schools  
Faith in New Jersey  
Faith in New York  
Families Together in New York State, Inc.  
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project  
Freedom For Immigrants  
Futures and Options  
Gersh Academy  
Getting Out and Staying Out  
Girl Vow  
Goddard Riverside  
Good Shepherd Services  
Graham Windham  
Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute  
Haitian Americans United For Progress, Inc.  
HeartShare St. Vincent's Services  
HERE to HERE  
Hispanic Federation  
INCLUDEnyc  
Internationals Network for Public Schools  
Jackson Heights People for Public Schools  
JobsFirstNYC  
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

Law Office of Meredith I. Madon  
Lawyers for Children, Inc.  
Learning to Work Coalition  
Legal Aid Society  
Legal Services NYC  
Liberation Diploma Plus High School  
Long Island Advocacy Center, Inc.  
Long Island Latino Teachers Association  
Lutheran Social Services of NY  
Mental Health Association of NYC  
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.  
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem  
New Visions for Public Schools  
New York Center for Interpersonal Development, Inc.  
New York Immigration Coalition  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
New York Math Academy and Coaching Services  
New York Performance Standards Consortium  
New York State Coalition of 853 Schools  
NYS TESOL  
NYSABE Region 1/Long Island  
Opportunity Network  
Rising Ground  
Saint Dominic's Family Services  
SCO Family of Services  
Sheltering Arms  
South Bronx Rising Together  
Special Education Law & Advocacy Clinic, Cardozo School of Law  
Starbridge  
Suffolk County Hispanic Advisory Board

Teens Take Charge

The Partnership for the Homeless

Tomorrow's Leaders NYC

United Neighborhood Houses

United We Stand

Urban Academy

Vibrant Emotional Health

Zone 126

**Individuals**

Abigail Kirchman, Teacher

Adriana Aviles, Advocate

Adrienne D. West, Teacher

Alan Aja, Parent; Professor of Public/Urban Policy

Alioune Sonko, Teacher

Allison Guttu, Parent; Parent Attorney

Ana María Aguilar , Parent

Andrea Daniels, Advocate; Parent

Angelo DiStefano, Parent

Ann Marie Fitzpatrick, Advocate; Parent

Anne Blake, Teacher; Job Coach

Anthony Sandusky, Advocate

Anya Meier, Teacher

Athena Leonardo, Teacher

Aurora Kushner, Concerned Citizen

Beth Sniffen, Advocate

Brian Collins, Teacher

Britt Williams, Teacher

Brooke Serra, Teacher

Capri Christianson, Advocate

Carmen Robles, CCSE APPOINTEE TO CCHS

Carol McLoughlin, Advocate  
Cecilia M. Espinosa, Educator  
Charles Maciejewski, Teacher  
Christine Olson, Administrator  
Christine Rague, Teacher  
Crystal Rosario, Parent  
Crystal Walthall, Advocate  
Cynthia J. Ware, Teacher  
Darya Oks, Teacher  
David Bloomfield, Higher Ed Faculty Member  
David Ward, Teacher  
Dayna Viola, Teacher  
Debra Kottage-Perrotto, Teacher  
Denise Del Rosario, Teacher  
Devora (Danielle) Courtney, Teacher  
Diana Mendez; Parent; Advocate  
Diana Weir, Taxpayer; Grandparent; Advocate  
Dianne Morales, NYC Mayoral Candidate  
Dr. Catherine Costa, Parent; Administrator  
Elizabeth Rivera, Administrator  
Elizabeth Santiago, Parent  
Emily Blanca Zapata, Teacher  
Emily Buchsbaum, Teacher  
Erin G. Stark, Administrator  
Eve Sims, Advocate  
Francesca Hagadus-McHale, Parent  
Genesis Martinez, Speech Language Pathologist  
Gregory Fisher, Teacher  
Harrison Delfin, Teacher  
Heidi Tannenbaum, Aunt

Iraida Bodre, Teacher  
Irma R., Parent; Teacher; Advocate  
Janel Obrien, Teacher  
Jared Fox, Teacher  
Jaye Jones, PhD, Administrator; Advocate  
Jeanine Rosado, Advocate  
Jennifer Hickey, Parent  
Jennifer L. Fox, Parent  
Jennifer Tawil, Parent  
Jeremy Greenfield, Parent; Advocate; Administrator  
Jessica Tambor, Advocate  
Joann Joseph, Parent  
Jonathan Green, Parent  
Josh Krinsky, Teacher  
Julie Harazduk, Parent; Concerned Citizen; Son graduated in 2019  
Julio Pena III, Advocate  
Karen Corvino, School staff  
Kate Menken, Professor  
Katherine Teasdale-Edwards, School Counselor / Advocate  
Kenny Abraham, Recent Graduate; Advocate  
Kimberley Cambridge, Advocate  
Kristen Crimmins Pugh, Parent  
Larry Wood, Advocate  
Lauren Galloway, Advocate; Student  
Lisa LoFaso, CBO staff  
Lissette Velez, Advocate  
Lizette Hernandez, Parent  
Luiggi Ramos, Teacher  
Marc Anthony Mendez, Self Advocate with Autism  
Marc Margolius, Advocate

Marcela Ossa Parra, Advocate  
Marelyn Pichardo, Administrator  
Margaret Blachly, Parent  
Margot Goldberg, Parent  
Marguerite Pagan, Advocate  
Maria Papadimitropoulos, Administrator  
Maria T. (Maite) Sánchez, Teacher; University faculty  
Marie F. Leblanc, Teacher  
Marie Lewis, Teacher  
Mark Alter, Professor  
Martha Whyte, Teacher  
Mary McNamara, Parent  
Mary Stapleton, Parent  
Maurice Blackmon, Teacher; Advocate  
Max Donatelli, DDAWNY Family Committee; Parent; Advocate  
Melvin Cunningham, Jedi Knight  
Michelle Noris and Josh Weitzman, Parent  
Miriam Edwin, Advocate  
Monica Enciso, Tutoring Director  
Mr. Lawrence CCD75 , Parent; Advocate  
Nancy Northrop, Advocate  
Natalie Yasmin Soto, Teacher  
Nina Greenberg, Teacher  
Nina Kogut-Akkum, Teacher  
Nnenna Akoma-Ononaji , Parent; Advocate; Social Education, Humane Activist  
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Pamela Henriquez, Teacher  
Pastor Rasool Berry, Advocate  
Patrick McGillicuddy, Administrator  
Patty Machir, Nonprofit leader

Paullette Healy, Advocate; Parent  
Rabbi Guy Austrian, Advocate  
Regina Albinus, Parent  
Rehana Ali, School Staff  
Reinaldo Hernandez, Teacher  
Rene McCormack, Parent  
Rev. Dr. Kevin D. Miller, Advocate  
Rev. John Magisano, Advocate  
Rev. Thia Reggio, Advocate  
Richard Syms, Advocate  
Robert Reyes, Teacher  
Roberta Grogan, Parent  
Robin McGinty, PhD candidate; Advocate  
Robin Stieglitz, Teacher  
Rosalie Friend, Ph.D., Advocate  
RueZalia Watkins, Advocate  
Samantha Love, Teacher  
Sara Toguchi, School Support Coach  
Sarah Mullins, Advocate  
Sarah Z Ahmed, Teacher  
Seth Rader, Teacher  
Shana Elizabeth Henry, PhD, Teacher  
Shari DiStefano, Parent;P/A President-SLT member  
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Shilisha October, Speech-Language Pathologist  
Stacy Blair, Teacher  
Stephanie Leveille, Parent  
Susan Vorsanger, Parent  
Susanne Marcus, Teacher  
Tamara Stern, Parent

Thomas Sheppard, CEC Presidents' Appointee - Panel for Educational Policy

Tracey A. Discepolo, Parent

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