

June 12, 2020

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

As the 2019-20 school year quickly draws to a close, we are writing as parents, students, educators, and advocates across New York State to follow up on our May 11<sup>th</sup> letter. We continue to urge the New York State Education Department (SED) and the Board of Regents **to give students 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 due to the pandemic.**

The need for your guidance on this issue is extremely urgent. In the absence of action by SED and the Board of Regents, up to 2,500 overage students will lose their opportunity to earn a high school diploma when they age out of school just two weeks from today. This is also a racial equity matter. In New York State, Black high school graduates are seven times more likely than White students to need six years in high school.<sup>1</sup> Latinx students are 7.3 times as likely to need six years. Many students aging out this year were slated to be seventh-year graduates; the racial disparities among these students are likely even more stark. These students are part of families and communities that have already been disproportionately burdened by the coronavirus pandemic.

Overage students are also overwhelmingly multilingual learners and students with disabilities. We are concerned that, due to COVID-19, 21-year-old students with disabilities have not had the opportunity to engage in the transition planning that would normally happen before they age out of school. We want to ensure these young people can return to school to receive the transition support that is not only critical to their future but legally required.

To ensure that 21-year-old students have the chance to earn their high school diploma and prepare for the transition to jobs and post-secondary programs, SED and the Board of Regents must issue guidance directing school districts to permit all students aging out this year without a diploma to continue their studies when school buildings reopen during the upcoming school year. In the absence of such action, overage students will be forced to transition to unfamiliar adult education programs or face surging unemployment rates without a diploma.

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<sup>1</sup> See attached fact sheet, "Who are Sixth-Year Graduates," available at [https://advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on\\_page/NP\\_6th\\_yr\\_grads\\_one-pg.pdf](https://advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on_page/NP_6th_yr_grads_one-pg.pdf)

We were glad to hear at this week's Board of Regents meeting that you are discussing this issue. The Board of Regents has the authority to direct school districts to allow overage students to remain in high school and should not leave this important decision to an individual district or school. With the school year ending in two weeks, the Board of Regents and SED must act urgently to ensure students aging out of school can return and receive the education they missed out on due to the pandemic.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and we stand ready to support your efforts to develop guidance. Please contact Ashley Grant at [agrant@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:agrant@advocatesforchildren.org) or 212-822-9548 or with any questions or to discuss our recommendations. We wish you health, safety and courage as you continue to provide necessary leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

### **Organizations**

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

ARISE Coalition

Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism Association

Bailey's Cafe

Bangladeshi American Community Development and Youth Services (BACDYS)

Big Picture Learning

Bronx Independent Living Services

Bronx International HS

Brooklyn Community Services

Brooklyn Defender Services

Brooklyn Center for the Disabled

Bronx Arena High School

Brunswick Central School District

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 Children's Agenda  
Children's Defense Fund - NY  
The Children's Law Center  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Citywide Council on High Schools  
Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE)  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York  
Coalition for Homeless Youth  
Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma  
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)  
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance  
Community Service Society  
Comprehensive Youth Development  
Cooke School and Institute  
Council for a Strong America  
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies  
Court Appointed Special Advocates - NYC  
Disability Rights New York  
EdTrust  
Eskolta School Research and Design  
ExpandedED Schools  
Faith in New York  
Families Together in New York State  
Fifth Avenue Committee  
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project  
Futures and Options  
Getting Out & Staying Out

Girl Vow, Inc.  
Good Shepherd Services  
Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute  
Haitian Americans United for Progress  
HERE to HERE  
Hispanic Federation  
INCLUDEnyc  
Independent Gray Party for NY  
IntegrateNYC  
Internationals Network for Public Schools  
The James Baldwin School  
JobsFirstNYC  
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center  
Latina Moms Connect  
Lawyers for Children, Inc.  
Learning to Work Coalition  
Learning Disabilities Association of New York State  
The Legal Aid Society  
Long Island Advocacy Center  
Long Island Latino Teachers Association  
The Manhattan International HS  
Mental Health Association of New York City  
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools  
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.  
New Visions for Public Schools  
New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation  
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 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  
Refugees Helping Refugees  
Zeinab Eyega, Sauti Yetu Center for African Women, Inc  
SCO Family of Services  
Sheltering Arms  
Special Education Law and Advocacy Field Clinic, Benjamin L. Cardozo School of Law  
Sinergia Metropolitan Parent Center  
Starbridge  
Education Committee, Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council  
Suffolk County Hispanic Advisory Board  
Tomorrow's Leaders NYC  
United We Stand  
Unity Preparatory Charter School of Brooklyn

Vibrant Emotional Health

The Urban Assembly

YOUTH POWER!

Zone 126

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