

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 12th 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.² 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."³

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.⁴ Similarly,

graduating ELLs were *six times as likely as non-ELLs* to need a 6th year.⁵ 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 pandemic⁶—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 18th, 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. 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
Olga Addison Advocate; Parent; CCHS Queens Rep.
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
Sharon Holden, M.S.Ed, J.D. School Counselor / Director of Future Planning
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

Tracey Austin, Advocate

Tully, Teacher

Ty Cesene, Administrator

Vanesty Lozada, Advocate

Zoila A. Del-Villar, Consultant