



THE NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION



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NEWS RELEASE

PARENTS DEMAND SWIFT INTERVENTION OF STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Delivers Demands to Board of Regents along with Light Bulbs to Symbolize Need for Openness and Transparency in Contracts for Excellence

(Albany, NY)--Parents and education advocacy groups from across the state delivered a protest letter to the NYS Board of Regents today calling on them to take a tough stand with local school districts regarding Contracts for Excellence, the state's new accountability system tied to funding increases for low performing school districts. The letter highlights specific problems parents have found with how local districts, including Buffalo and New York City, are designing their 2008-09 Contract. The Regents were presented with light bulbs to illustrate the need for greater openness and transparency in the Contract for Excellence process. Last year only 11% of districts complied with the Regents' requirement for public participation. The parent and education organizations demanded that the Regents take immediate action to ensure that each district complies with state law and regulations.

The organizations represented were among the architects of the Contracts for Excellence and have played key roles in formulating the corresponding legislative language. As the state enters into the second year of its four-year accountability enhancement plan, the call for the Regents to immediately adopt strong regulations to guide the development and approval of the contracts and ensure that Contract submissions are submitted by July 1 is critical.

"The Contract for Excellence process is required by law to include the public. The Education Department and the Board of Regents must adopt and enforce strong regulations to include public participation and full transparency. Every district must comply with the governing regulations. There can be no exceptions. The

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Regents must see to it that each and every district is in full compliance with the law. Another year of the State Education Department tolerating non-compliance by school districts is unacceptable," said Nikki Jones, Communications Coordinator, Alliance for Quality Education.

"The Contract for Excellence is in its second year of a four year process to resolve the Campaign for Fiscal Equity litigation. The Contracts are supposed to be due on July 15. Yet the Regents and the State Education Department are waiting until July to issue regulations that set the rules of the road. We call on the Regents to act immediately to issue regulations that ensure full public participation in the development and approval of the Contracts, clear benchmarks and data to measure success, transparent information on program investments at the school level, and a sound method of getting the bulk of the dollars to high needs kids in low performing schools," said Helaine Doran, Deputy Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Problems already identified in local Contract proposal processes and brought to the attention of the Regents include the Buffalo City School District and the New York City Department of Education. The Buffalo City School District gave parents and community members a 2-day notice of its public hearing. The public hearing is scheduled tonight and a written email notification went out Friday morning May 16. This notification violates the Regents' regulations requiring "reasonable notice" to allow for meaningful public participation. Local advocates plan to demonstrate outside of the meeting tonight in Buffalo in protest. In New York City parents are outraged at the allocation of funds to over 1400 schools with no specific plans on how to spend the funds. Rather than developing educational strategies through the Contract for Excellence process and then allocating funds to schools, the DOE plans to distribute funding without a plan and then find out from principals what programs they intend to implement.

"Parents in the Buffalo community are outraged that the district would blatantly, in defiance of Contract for Excellence regulations, schedule a public hearing with virtually no notice. This does not allow parents adequate time to prepare," said Michael Mc Duffie, AQE Steering Committee member. "The Board of Regents must step in and force the Buffalo City School District to respect the regulations, the parents and more importantly the children it serves."

"The Contract for Excellence money is owed to our children. Parents will not sit back and allow it to be stolen from our kids. We are holding the Board of Regents accountable for ensuring that districts are in compliance with the regulations, and making sure the public is included in the decision making process. The Board of Regents has a long-term obligation and an immediate one: to step in to ensure that NYC develops their contract plan before distributing the funds to schools." said Nicole Monroe, parent and New York City Coalition for Educational Justice leader.

Last year Albany's entire Contract for Excellence funds were diverted to charter schools and as a result the Albany City School District was not required to complete a Contract for Excellence. This year a large portion of the funds will again go to charter schools, but the district will be required to complete a Contract. "The Regents must adopt and enforce strong regulations that include transparency and public hearings with reasonable notice to ensure that this process works. Along with other parents in the community I look forward to participating in the decision making process that will affect my children and our schools," said Susan Pedo parent and Citizen Action of New York member.

“Our kids can’t afford to have a repeat of last year where parents had no way of knowing what new programs and services were created as a result of the historic CFE settlement,” said José Davila, Director of State Government Affairs for the New York Immigration Coalition. “Commissioner Mills and the Board of Regents must hold districts to a higher standard and ensure each Contract for Excellence has a real plan to improve instruction for English language learner students and other at-risk youth.”

“Education reform leaders across the State have worked hard to create a public process that will hold districts accountable for allocating this funding to the neediest students,” said Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, Staff Attorney for Advocates for Children. “The State must now ensure that districts do not short circuit the public process by distributing funds without meaningful public input and with no way of knowing if these funds actually reach the students who need them the most.”

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