



EXCELLENCE FOR ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN NOW: A CALL TO
PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

[March 2014: This is the first in a series of writings, workshops and mobilizations by The Coalition for Public Education / Coalición por la Educación Pública (CPE / CEP) calling on NYC public school parents¹ to take on the responsibility of changing, and ultimately transforming the NYC public school system.]

The NYC public school system has long been in crisis as far as our children are concerned. For many NYC students, public school is at best, profoundly mediocre and at worst, a “pipeline to... oblivion”. This is especially true for *most* Black and Latino students. The invasive and illegal race-based police harassment and “stop...and frisk” practices of Giuliani and Bloomberg, have endangered these youth while they were outside of school. Inside of the schools they were disproportionately suspended, disillusioned, discouraged and pushed out as well.

A course correction is in order: Parents and fellow rights holders, we must be the change that our children need. If not us, then who? During, the most recent twenty years the state (gubernatorial, legislative & regents) and city (mayoral & city council) elected officials have devastated our children. With rare exceptions, these officials share varying degrees of culpability for this present NYC public school system. It is a school system that has failed the vast majority of its students; especially Black, Latino and Indigenous students. Members of lower income households are greatly underserved, and students, who have special needs, can fare among the worse of the worse.

¹ That includes current public school parents and also past and even future public school parents.

Even with the advent of new mayor, de Blasio, the same system, rife with inequity & inequality at all levels, is still in place. Parents, real change won't come without *conscious change* on our parts. To implement the necessary changes, there must be a new paradigm for *political power*. One in which "we the people" develop a much stronger and more *cohesive political will* as we organize and educate ourselves. Through collaboration and the process of organizing we collectively gain capacity to help build a movement for real change in our schools, and to direct and give leadership to the officials, whom we elect and hire. In this way, the policies that public officials implement will reflect the goals that "we the people" have determined. To deliver the strong, well-informed parent leadership that is required, parents must develop a strong, independent, citywide parent organization.

While the needed changes are many, the goal that we seek can be simply stated: ***"We call for a public school system that provides every student with the genuine opportunity for an excellent education."***

Educational Excellence, Equity and Diversity: Every child has a fundamental human right to an excellent education. In meeting this responsibility to *every student*, a school system must combine educational excellence *with* equity. Understand that "equity" (or fairness throughout the system) necessitates that educational excellence cannot just be available to some students, but that it must be available to **all students**.

However, each child's experiences as a student will not –and should not-- be exactly the same. Children/students are diverse; and that is a good thing. There is an abundance of solid experience and research, which documents that children learn in a variety of ways and may possess differing learning strengths and "intelligences". For *all* of its students to flourish, a school system must

embrace this diversity.² It must be nurturing to all while offering them a variety of *high quality, interesting, enriching, challenging and empowering* pathways to learning (that is, to academic achievement and to personal development). There is a beautifully inseparable linkage between and among educational excellence, equity and diversity. A school system cannot be excellent without also ensuring equity (of opportunity to learn and excel). And a school system can only achieve equity when it thoughtfully and conscientiously embraces “difference” (diversity) among its students along with their many similarities/commonalities.

Inequality Is Our Reality Unfortunately, “excellence with equity ” is rarely the case within public school systems nationally or in New York State; and is certainly not present in the NYC DoE; where inequality rules. Race and household income are, of course, critical factors in the inequalities manifested in this city and in this public school system. In fact, there is a substantial body of research, which places NYC among the most racially, economically and educationally stratified and separated/segregated cities in the US. Therefore it is not surprising that the NYC public education system does not provide most of its public school students with a high quality education. More to the point, students identified as African ancestry / Black, Latino or Indigenous³, constitute over 72% of New York City’s public school population, yet they are overwhelmingly under-educated in the NYC public school system. In sharp contrast, a relatively small percentage of students, which is overwhelmingly white and Asian, receive what is generally described as an excellent public school education.⁴ On the matter of educational excellence and equity in 2014, a look inside the tip of what some call

² In future writings and workshops we will look closely at the central importance of a school system actually embracing the difference and diversity of its students in order to improve achievement and eventually attain educational excellence with equity.

³ The Indigenous student population is far less than one percent in NYC; however, the generally problematic educational experiences of these three student groupings are generally very similar.

⁴ In subsequent writings and workshops we will make the case that even the educational experiences of these “high achieving” students are severely undermined by some of the core problems of the system.

“NYC’s public education achievement pyramid”, reveals that when compared to their respective percentages in the public school student population, Black and Latino students are about 20 times *less likely* to occupy a seat in New York’s highest ranked public high schools than their white and Asian student counterparts. **Note:** If there were *proportional equity*, this ratio would be 1 to 1 (or 1:1) Black and Latino students to white and Asian students, and not the actual 1 to 20 (or 1:20)⁵. Interestingly, over the last seven to eight years of the Bloomberg-Klein-Black-Wolcott mayoral control era, these already gross inequalities worsened by more than 25 percent.

According to the New York State Department of Education’s (NYSED) data, a whopping forty percent of NYC’s high school Classes of 2011, 2012 and 2013 did not graduate on-time. The discrete percentages for African ancestry students, Latino students and Indigenous students who did not graduate on time are drastically worse. According to the UFT on-line publication, Edwize, there is a 20-percentage point lower rate for Black students than white students and a 22-percentage point lower graduation rate for Latino students compared to white students. NYSED data also indicates that over this same period, only about one student in five NYC high school students was considered to be “college ready” after four years. Once again, as poor as these overall numbers are, the college readiness percentages for NYC Black and Latino students in 2013 were more appalling: 11.1 percent (about 1 of every 9 students) and 12.2 percent (about 1 of every 8 students) respectively. These data are simply the briefest of reflectors of a devastating and long lasting reality of academic hopes dashed, human potential squandered and especially of a huge swath of Black, Latino and Indigenous children’s lives left unfulfilled and potentially ruined.

⁵ Data and methodology regarding this particular metric of *educational excellence with equity* will be presented in a future writing or workshop and subsequently made generally available.

In closing, CPE's members acknowledge the work and commitment of the thousands of parents across the city, already working in their schools and districts to make things better for our children. After years of involvements in and with parent associations, school leadership teams, presidents councils, community education councils, our members respect what you do. However, to begin to cure what ails this school system, we recognize that much more is needed from all of us.

While some parents across the city are up to speed on the many important matters confronting children and their schools, too many of us are not. More importantly, we realize that by coming together across the city, to organize and educate ourselves, "we" could know more than any one parent can know. And we could do more for our children than any one parent can do. Part of our early challenge is to struggle together and to become a unified whole. In Unity, there is strength. In strength there is the chance to transform the system.

Call us and visit us on line!