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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **PARENTS AND EDUCATION ADVOCATES DEMAND STRONG SCHOOL FUNDING ACCOUNTABILITY 218 parents, educators and community leaders sign letter to Regents**

(Albany, NY) After 14 years of court battles and legislative fights, parents and education advocates from across the state have now turned their focus to the New York State Board of Regents. On Monday, more than three dozen parents from across the state will have traveled to Albany to attend the monthly meeting of the State Board of Regents. They called upon the Board of Regents to ensure that the historic new level of state school aid makes it into the classrooms where it is needed the most and results in increased academic performance.

Governor Spitzer's groundbreaking new school accountability system, the Contracts for Excellence, will mean nothing unless the Board of Regents adopts strong regulations. Speaking at a news conference on the steps of State Education Department (SED) prior to the Regents meeting, parents and education advocates outlined their priorities for what the Regents must adopt as part of the regulations governing the new Contracts.

"Some people say money in education does not matter, but we know it does," said Helaine Doran, Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) Deputy Executive Director. "After 14 years of litigation, we will have the funds to undo the education funding inadequacies of the past. But there cannot be success if there is no accountability in implementation. The actions of the Regents will determine whether we can provide a sound basic education, with clear investments in serving the kids with the highest educational needs, and securing clear results."

The Regents, the Commissioner of Education and the SED are writing regulations and guidance that will govern the accountability reforms. The strength

of the accountability plan created by the law will depend on whether the Regents put teeth into these rules that will drive enforcement.

Prior to the Regents meeting, the education advocates delivered a letter to each of the Regents members signed by 218 parents, educators and community leaders from across the state. The letter called for the Regents to adopt strong regulations reflecting their priorities. In the past few days more than 300 parents have sent emails and letters similar to the letter delivered today to each member of the Board of Regents.

The parents and education advocates called upon the Regents to adopt regulations that: ensure that the programs created with new state aid predominately benefit the neediest students; require the Contracts to be clear, simple and easily understandable; and show how and where the money will be invested and the anticipated outcomes. The Regents must also provide for clear guidelines for meaningful public participation in the development of the Contracts by school districts.

“For years we have fought as parents to get the resources that our schools need to succeed,” said Anne Pope, Northeast Regional Director of the NAACP and an Albany parent and grandparent. “It is now time for the Board of Regents to make sure that these new resources deliver the results that our kids so desperately deserve.”

The 2007-08 Education Budget and Reform Act requires 56 school districts in the 2007-08 school year to target new foundation aid to a menu of five priorities including smaller class sizes, teacher and principal quality initiatives, full-day pre-kindergarten, increased time on task and high school/middle school restructuring. Programs must predominately serve students with the greatest educational needs, including students from poor households, English Language Learners and special education students. The law also requires public participation in formulating local contracts, including public hearings and a parent grievance process.

“Parents, students and community organizations have fought for 14 years to win the increased state aid, and our continued input will add value in determining what both schools and districts should incorporate in their plans,” said Nikki Jones of the Alliance for Quality Education. “The Regents must ensure that regulations require districts to work with groups like ours to maximize student success.”

“Now that the state has come through with funds, we’ve got to make sure our schools get this right and our kids get the solid education they need, “ said Jose Davila, Director of State Government Affairs for the New York Immigration Coalition. “We urge the Regents and Education Department to enact strong regulations and district contracts that direct all schools to provide increased and

improved instruction and hold schools accountable for using most of the new funds for at-risk youth like immigrant kids learning English.”

Among the list of specific areas in which school districts are allowed to target new aid under the Contracts is middle and high school restructuring. Zakiyah Ansari of the Coalition for Educational Justice spoke about the need for investing money in these types of reform.

“Middle school is where we start to lose children, and if we can improve our middle schools the graduation rate will improve. We can improve middle schools by having a rigorous core curriculum that includes arts and music, by providing an emotional support system with guidance counselors and social workers in schools, and by ending over-crowding in middle schools. If we do that, we will see a lot more middle school kids going on to succeed in high school and graduate.”

While more than a million school children attend schools within districts required to complete the Contracts, many districts are currently exempt from the Contract requirements despite underperforming schools. Many of these exempted schools are lower performing in terms of test scores or graduation rates than some of the schools currently required to complete Contracts. AQE and CFE are continuing to advocate for an expansion of the list of districts required to complete the Contracts.

“In addition to ensuring that the Contracts for Excellence are strong and effective, we must ensure that all districts which are underperforming are required to complete Contracts in the future,” said Darrin Green, a parent from Brentwood Long Island. “Long Island is the home to several struggling school districts that should be required to complete Contracts but are not, simply because they don’t meet the state aid threshold.”

The Regents is expected to adopt final permanent regulations and NYSED is expected to issue final permanent guidance documents for implementing the Contracts by September.