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NEWS RELEASE

PARENTS DEMONSTRATE AT REGENT'S MEETING TO PROTEST NYS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S HANDLING OF CONTRACTS FOR EXCELLENCE

AQE RELEASES REPORT DOCUMENTING THE PROBLEMS
REPORT TITLE: *WILL ACCOUNTABILITY BE ENFORCED?*

(Albany, NY) Parents, students, education advocates and community organizations from across the state organized by the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) held a demonstration during the NYS Board of Regents meeting today to protest the State Education Department's handling of the Contracts for Excellence. The groups aired grievances and released a report documenting the degree of problems with SED's oversight of the 2008-09 Contracts for Excellence, New York's newest accountability system. Parents demanded that the Regents return submitted Contracts un-reviewed from districts that have not complied with the requirements for full public disclosure and public input. Both public disclosure and input are key accountability components of the Contract for Excellence. The report offers an evaluation of the public participation compliance levels in all thirty-nine Contract for Excellence districts in the state. Joining in the action by over 100 parents from Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, New York City and Long Island were Citizen Action of New York, ACORN, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

"As a parent of children in the Buffalo district I know the importance of being active in my children's school and having my voice heard. It is my responsibility to speak up and make sure my children's needs are being met. If the Regents don't enforce the public participation regulations they are basically giving districts the green light to ignore us," said Bryon McIntyre, Buffalo parent.

Last year, only 11% districts complied with the regulations requiring them to solicit public comment prior to submission of the Contract for Excellence yet SED approved every district's Contract. This year, districts are required to include the public in the Contract's formation by holding a public hearing, collecting public comment and submitting transcripts of each hearing to the Commissioner. Prior to holding a hearing each district must provide the community with a detailed notice including: a general description of the proposed 2008-09 Contract; a detailed description of the proposed monetary allocations broken down by school, program area, student achievement targets and affected student population; measurements of projected increases in student performance; information on where to obtain a copy of the proposed Contract as well as a description of the public hearing process including the procedures for submission of public comments.

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Without this level of detail parents are unable to give meaningful input in the Contract process or play a role in holding school districts accountable.

Key Report Findings

Most Districts Fall Short on Public Disclosure and Public Participation (as of 7/21/08)

- Only 8 school districts held a public hearing and provided adequate detail on Contract programs including allocations by schools and programs.
- 14 school districts held or scheduled a public hearing and solicited public comment, but did not provide adequate detail on Contract programs and/or allocations by school and program.
- 3 School districts provided some public information but have not held or scheduled a public hearing.
- 6 School districts held a public hearing, but did not provide any information to the public regarding the content of their Contract.
- 8 School districts provided no information regarding their Contract for Excellence and have not held or scheduled a public hearing.

The report also found that a second accountability document, the *District Improvement Plans*, that was enacted into law in 2007 and in many ways mirrors the Contracts for Excellence has been ignored by SED and school districts.

“Children in Central Islip, Wyandanch and Brentwood can not afford to continue to be ignored by the Commissioner and the Board of Regents. The districts are out of compliance with the law and are denying parents a chance to be included. This is unacceptable. The District Improvement Plans must be implemented. Our children need accountability too,” said Amparo Sadler of Central Islip.

“It took our district several attempts before they got an adequate level of detail out to the community and only because we applied pressure on the district. To get this done we had to turn out to school board meetings, and write the Commissioner of Education before they finally got the needed info and enough advance notification to the public. We're glad that Syracuse has provided the details on the district's plans for our children. In other parts of the state parents are still waiting. It should not take the pressure of parents as watchdogs to get the job done right. The SED and the districts should get the job done right the first time,” said Margaret Glenn, AQE Steering Committee member and Syracuse resident.

“The purpose of the Contracts for Excellence is to ensure accountability in school districts across the state. If SED does not enforce full public disclosure and parent and community input, how will there be accountability?” said Billy Easton, Alliance for Quality Education, Executive Director

“CFE has been fighting for 15 years to see that New York's schools have adequate resources to provide our students with their constitutional right to a sound basic education. Our struggle has not only been about increased funding. It has also been about accountability. That is why the education budget and reform law passed in 2007 to resolve the CFE lawsuit includes the Contracts for Excellence accountability tool. We have worked closely with SED and the Regents to ensure that the regulations match the law. But law and regulations are only effective if they are enforced. We

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stand with AQE and parents and education stakeholders from Contract districts across the state in calling for the Regents to uphold the regulations and follow the recommendations presented in AQE's report," said Geri D. Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

"In New York City we had a round of hearings back in June that included very little detail. Parents did not have a clear understanding of what the DOE's plans were. The second set of hearings will be held tomorrow and Wednesday, but the proposed Contract was only released this past week. Again this does not allow parents enough time to absorb the information and make an intelligent judgement, " said Zakiyah Ansari Coalition for Educational Justice member.

"Albany will hold its Contract for Excellence public hearing next Tuesday but has yet to release details on the Contract programs or anticipated outcomes. If the information is not made available to the public it will be impossible to expect meaningful input," said Tony Guinta, spokes person for Citizen Action of NY."

The report can be found online at www.aqeny.org.