

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

March 10, 2017

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We are mothers and grandmothers of children whose schools have been neglected by New York State for years and we write to you regarding our children's education and their futures. As parents, just like you, we want our children to have access to a high quality education.

Last weekend many of us joined with thousands of New Yorkers in cities across the state to march in the bitter cold for education justice. Your response was troublesome and offensive: "For some people it's never enough, it's never enough, it's never enough."

We are not "some people"! We are parents. We are taxpayers. We are voters. When you say for "some people it's never enough" you are talking about our children.

The sad fact is that New York State has two education systems, one for the rich and one for the poor, and the state has never provided enough educational opportunity for our children and our communities. When we demand an end to this separate and unequal reality you dismiss us. When you dismiss us, you dismiss our children.

Like all parents, we want the best opportunities for our children. We will never be satisfied with an education system that provides opportunities to some children, but denies them to others. We want our children to have a world class education, one that addresses the realities they face every day and provides them a pathway to college or careers. Your response is that we ask for too much.

New York has some of the top public schools in the nation. These school districts often spend \$30,000 or more per pupil each year and are able to offer a wealth of amazing programs for their students. Our school districts cannot afford to spend anywhere near this amount, and are unable to offer a comparable education. We do not criticize these communities for investing in their children. As Governor you have the power to end these inequities, instead your policies tolerate and perpetuate them and you dismiss our demand for justice.

Consider these examples:

- Two-thirds of students in Chappaqua participate in more than 85 clubs and organizations and 72 different sports teams. By contrast, the Buffalo City School District has been forced to restrict access to summer and afterschool programs that provide important enrichment and advancement opportunities for students.
- Students at Jericho High School have the opportunity to take part in the school's science and social science research programs, which prepare them for prestigious national competitions such as the Intel Science Talent Search. But many high schools in New York do not even have science labs. In Utica, students have had to fundraise in order to purchase the chemicals needed for chemistry experiments.

- The Syosset Central School District has an intensive mandatory foreign language program beginning with kindergarten. The Albany City School District, where the number of English Language learners (ELL) has skyrocketed from 300 to 1,300 in the last decade, cannot afford enough ELL teachers, and without an increase in funding from the state will not be able to follow through on plans for a new school that would specialize in meeting the needs of these students.
- In North Salem, students can participate in a guided internship program designed to prepare them for post-high school education and entry into the workforce. Meanwhile, in Yonkers, there is just one guidance counselor for every 750 students and students attend class in 100-year-old buildings that are desperately in need of repairs.
- Edgemont High School has a music and theater program that offers students the chance to take part in orchestra, the sports pep band, chorus, chamber choir, and wind ensemble, among other programs, but Brentwood cannot afford to offer students art and music classes every week.
- Briarcliff Manor recently completed a renovation of the school's cardiovascular training and weight lifting center, including new equipment, increased space, and flat screen televisions. But Syracuse City School District was forced to close three school buildings in 2016 due to financial pressures.

Not only are the opportunities significantly curtailed in our schools, the challenges are also much greater. There is no question that it is costlier to educate English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged students. Most wealthy districts in New York have very few ELLs, but enrollment is rapidly growing in high need districts. Many schools with 10, 15 or even 30 percent ELL students still lack enough ELL teachers. Wealthy school districts commonly serve very few economically disadvantaged students, but in Rochester and New York City, 91 percent and 71 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, respectively. Yet in New York City, over 300,000 students are in classes of 30 or more students, including 43,000 in kindergarten through third grade.

Educational opportunities matter in terms of outcomes. Typically, nearly every student in wealthy districts graduates and more than 90 percent enroll in four year colleges. But in high-need districts, dropout rates near ten percent are not uncommon and often only about 25 percent of the students who do graduate enroll in four-year colleges.

Of the \$4.3 billion in Foundation Aid owed due to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court decision, 58 percent is owed to Black and Brown students; and 76 percent is owed to students in high-need school districts. These are the students for whom there has never been enough educational opportunity.

Governor Cuomo, your policies have exacerbated the inequities based upon race and income and your proposal this year to repeal the Foundation Aid formula would permanently lock them in place.

As concerned parents, we will continue to tell this story of educational inequity. You have neglected the state's moral and constitutional obligation to adequately educate all students regardless of where they live, the color of their skin, or the size of their families' bank accounts. It is time for New York State to end a school finance system that benefits the children of "some people" at the expense of the rest of us. It is time to stop the excuses for not funding the Foundation Aid formula and put an end to the educational disparities between the haves and the have nots.

We demand that you fully fund our children's schools in this year's budget by following the recommendations of the New York State Board of Regents for a three-year phase-in of Foundation Aid.

We demand that you prioritize our most vulnerable students — our students of color, our students who live in poverty, our students with disabilities, our LGBTQIA students, our immigrant and refugee students — by providing them with schools that have the resources to offer them opportunities for success.

And, we demand that *all* of our students start receiving “enough.”

Zakiyah Ansari Brooklyn Mother & Grandmother	Meredith Huer Beacon Mother	Jestina Weems Brooklyn Mother
Flor Ostorga Brentwood Mother	Dionne McNeil Queens Mother	Randy Wheat Syracuse Mother & Grandmother
Robin Caufield Brentwood Grandmother	Olga Addison Queens Grandmother	Sandy Baker Syracuse Grandmother
Michelle O'Leary Hoosick Falls Mother	Elzora Cleveland Manhattan Mother	Sara Jo Brandt-Doelle Syracuse Mother
Shatiki Beatty Schenectady Mother	Patricia Padilla Washington Heights Mother	Donna L. Nortman Syracuse Mother
Jamaica Miles Schenectady Mother	Nicole Job Brooklyn Mother & Grandmother	Susan Fahey Glisson Syracuse Mother
Dr. Deidre Butler Schenectady, Mother	Natasha Capers Brooklyn Mother	Rosemary Rivera Rochester Mother & Grandmother
India Walton Buffalo Mother	Lisa Rudley Ossining Mother	Amy Kallander Jamesville Mother
Sophia Howard-Johnson Buffalo Mother	Marisa O'Leary Peekskill Mother	Sallie Williams Rochester Mother & Grandmother
Lydia Rodriguez Rochester Mother	Diana Lemon Ossining Mother	Marina Marcou-O'Malley Albany Mother
Pia Moller Rochester Mother	Aneesah Evans Syracuse Mother	Sarah Gilbert Syracuse Mother
Branwen McDonald Peekskill Mother	Julie Gozan Syracuse mother	