

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

December 19, 2018

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We are mothers, fathers, grandparents, and caregivers of children whose schools have been neglected by New York State for years. As parents, just like you, we want our children to have access to a high quality education. Your children have received the highest quality public education in the Byram Hills schools and at the elite prep school Deerfield Academy. We are in no way criticizing Byram Hills schools for offering their students an excellent education, they are simply fulfilling their mission. But we are distressed that you continue to deny our children the opportunity for a “sound, basic education” that is their constitutional right.

In a speech Monday you said that the Foundation Aid owed to our schools and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity are “ghosts from the past and distractions from the present.” You could not say that if your child was in an under resourced school. In a recent interview on WAMC radio, you cynically dismissed the educational resources our children need as nothing more than “the same dance” in what, for you, as you said Monday, is “all a political game.” The New York State Board of Regents has recommended a \$2.1 billion increase in school aid and a three year phase-in of the Foundation Aid that is owed to our schools in order to expand equity. But you treat our students’ unmet education needs as nothing but a political ploy by asserting that the Regents proposal is an exaggerated “tremendous increase” that is just a bargaining position.

Let’s be crystal clear about which students’ educational needs you so easily dismiss. While Foundation Aid is owed to high needs districts of all types from rural upstate to suburban high needs, 62 percent of this funding is owed to high need school districts with over 50 percent Black and Latino student populations. That is why your opposition to adequate funding for our schools perpetuates systemic educational racism.

You consistently ignore the dramatic inequities in educational opportunities across New York State. New York has some of the top public schools in the nation. We are thrilled that school districts like Byram Hills are able to offer a wealth of amazing programs. Students there have the opportunity to spend three years working on a science project to prepare for a highly prestigious national science competition. But many high schools in New York do not even have science labs. In Utica students have had to fundraise for the chemicals needed for chemistry experiments. All Byram Hills high school seniors complete a 6-week internship in fields they plan to study in college, many of them commute to New York City for these internships. Meanwhile Brentwood cannot afford to offer students art and music every week and Buffalo has to restrict access to summer and afterschool programs. In Yonkers there is one guidance counsellor for 800 students, in Byram Hills the ratio is one to 175. While thousands of New York City students take classes in trailers and Yonkers students are in 100-year-old buildings desperately needing repairs, Byram Hills was able to renovate their tennis courts, football field, track, and baseball and softball fields and upgrade fan seating.

The many excellent educational opportunities offered at Byram Hills are wonderful, but they are unavailable to our children at our local public schools. Byram Hills spends more than \$33,000 per pupil each year which is much, much more than what our districts are able to spend. (At Deerfield Academy the tuition and fees per pupil is \$44,735 for non-boarding students which provides access to the most elite of prep school educations).

Not only are the opportunities significantly less in our schools, than the schools your children attended, the challenges are much greater. While Byram Hills has less than one percent English Language learners, Peekskill has 11 percent, yet, like many districts, lacks enough bilingual and English as Second Language teachers and support professionals. While Buffalo and New York City have 79 percent and 71 percent economically disadvantaged students, Byram Hills has only four percent. We can all agree it costs more to educate English

Language learners and economically disadvantaged students, yet our children are receiving less. Under your leadership the spending gap between wealthy and poor school districts has grown to \$10,000 per pupil.

Educational opportunities matter in terms of outcomes. One hundred percent of Byram Hills students graduated last year and 98 percent enrolled in four year colleges. In Albany nine percent of students dropped out and only 24 percent enrolled in four year colleges. This contrast is not unique to Byram Hills and Albany, it is the story of educational inequity across New York State where race, income and zip code determine the educational opportunities available to our children.

The recommendations of the Board of Regents are based upon what it will actually cost to guarantee all children have access to a “sound, basic education.” To us it seems as if you do not care about our children. You have never supported fully funding Foundation Aid, in fact two years ago you attempted to repeal the Foundation Aid formula. The Foundation Aid formula is not a formula to determine how to divide up an arbitrary amount of funding among school districts. Rather it is a formula that calculates, on a district-by-district basis, what schools need to ensure every child has access to a quality education. In calculating these educational needs, it factors in the differences across districts in student poverty, English language learners and students with disabilities, and it includes regional cost differences and the income and property wealth of local communities.

The political benefit of your continued opposition to adequate educational opportunities for every child is that you can continue to allow lower taxes for your millionaire and billionaire campaign donors and you can provide multi-billion dollar subsidies to corporations like Amazon through economic development programs—even though such programs in your administration have been larded with corruption and have failed to provide promised jobs.

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. End the educational disparities between the haves and the have nots. As you said Monday, every child, rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural, deserves the same quality education. But your refusal to fully fund Foundation Aid stands in the way of this happening.

Our children are not bargaining chips, they deserve the same opportunities as children with greater economic resources.

Susana Chin  
Mother, Milton, NY

Ivette Alfonso  
Grandparent, Albany, NY

Thomas Sheppard  
Father, Bronx, NY

Claire Cousin  
Mother, Hudson, NY

Lece Wright  
Mother, Albany, NY

Erycka Montoya  
Mother, Queens, NY

Jamaica Miles  
Mother, Schenectady, NY

Clyana Lightbourn  
Mother, Troy, NY

Fadumo Farax  
Mother, New York, NY

Branwen MacDonald  
Mother, Peekskill, NY

Manauvaskar Kublall  
Father, Orange County, NY

Katie Peinovich  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Martin McDonald  
Father, Peekskill, NY

Ina Ferguson  
Community leader, Buffalo

Danette Rodriguez  
Mother, Queens, NY

Katrina Mcghee  
Mother, Schenectady, NY

Gayla Thompson  
Grandmother, Buffalo, NY

Rachel Netski  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Smita Vadakehalam  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Kim West  
Mother, Queens, NY

Nicole Job  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Elise Coleman  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Willie Jones  
Father, Queens, NY

Kenneth Shaw  
Father, New York, NY

Julissa Bisono  
Mother, Queens, NY

Flaviana Linares  
Mother, Queens, NY

Micaela Toledano  
Mother, Queens, NY

Anita Alulema  
Mother, Queens, NY

Toyin Anderson  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Martha Herrera  
Mother, Queens, NY

Maria Hernández,  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Ana María Hernández  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Lorena Méndez Prek  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Plácida Rodríguez  
Grandmother, Brooklyn, NY

Luis Fonseca  
Father, Brooklyn, NY

Paula Sippel  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Olivia Paul  
Mother, Utica, NY

Mutale Nkonde  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Tabitha St. Bernard  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Brandi Webb  
Mother, Manhattan, NY

Chevion Weaks-Lopez  
Mother, Queens, NY

Tanesha Grant  
Mother, New York, NY

Charles L. Johnson  
Father, Brooklyn, NY

Paola Mendoza  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Natasha Capers  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Jenna Na-Clapp  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Charlotte & Kirk Douglas  
Parents, Brooklyn, NY

Alicia Arrington  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Jose Vilson  
Father, New York, NY

Kaliris Salas-Ramirez  
Mother, New York, NY

Angelo Pinto  
Father, New York, NY

Dionne McNeil  
Mother, Queens, NY

Zakiyah Ansari  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Mark Winston-Griffith  
Father, Brooklyn, NY

Gaia Schermerhorn  
Mother, Brooklyn, NY

Kathleen Ward  
Mother, Manlius, NY

Marybeth Callahan  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Mercedes Phelan  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Marina Marcou-O'Malley  
Mother, Albany, NY

Mary Lupien  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Walida Monroe-Sims  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Neely Kelley  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Julia Dippel  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Joe Di Fiore  
Father, Rochester, NY

Mary Adams  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Ricardo Adams  
Father, Rochester, NY

Pia Møller,  
Parent, Rochester, NY

Ashley Gantt,  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Michelle Masterton , RCSD  
Mother Rochester, NY

Pamela Adams  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Victoria Robertson  
Mother, Rochester, NY

Eric Reveda  
Father, Peekskill, NY