

CROTON-HARMON SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Board of Education
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May 30, 2015

Chancellor Meryl H. Tisch
Commissioner, MaryEllen Elia
NY State Board of Regents via eval2015@nysed.gov
Regent Judith Johnson (via direct email and mail)
Assemblywoman and Education Chair, Cathy Nolan
Assemblywoman Sandy Galef
Senator and Education Chair, Carl L. Marcellino
Senator Terrance Murphy
Speaker of the House Carl Heastie
Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan

Dear Chancellor Tisch, Commissioner Elia, Regents, and Honorable Legislators:

The Croton-Harmon community -- including parents, students, teachers, administrators, tax payers, and voters -- has never been more unified or motivated to advocate for public education. On their behalf, we thank you for the different parts you played in support of public education this spring:

- increased funding for our schools, and public schools across the state
- a pledge to work towards abolishing the Gap Elimination Act in 2016
- attempts to improve the mandated teacher's Annual Professional Performance Review program (APPR) for teachers and administrators

However, our community has deep concerns about key parts of the Governor's Education Transformation agenda that passed with the state budget. On behalf of our public, students and teachers we respectfully but insistently urge you to work together to accomplish the following:

1. **SLOW DOWN THE APPR PROCESS** and take the time necessary to develop a meaningful and just plan. Move the deadline for school district submission of the modified APPR plans to September 1, 2016 – a year later than what has been mandated, and include a 90 day period for public comment. **We ask the legislators to make this issue a priority** since the State's Regents and Education Chancellor have already stated that it will be impossible to achieve a meaningful system on this timetable. To attempt to move forward as planned will waste time, money and add a tremendous amount of unnecessary and non-productive stress on children, educators and tax payers. New York should be on the forefront of education reform. Our citizens desire and deserve better than this.
2. **ENGAGE EXPERTS** to perform a detailed review of the APPR proposal. Convene a task force of qualified and independent experts and practitioners to develop an educationally-sound evaluation program that is rooted in research and demonstrated best practices, uses multiple measures to provide clear pictures of educational outcomes, and rejects elements that place undue reliance on state testing and an ill-considered program to use outside evaluators.

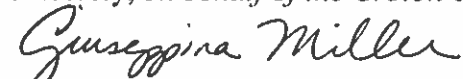
3. PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY for the NY State testing program, especially for grades 3-8, and including field testing. It is evident that many members of the public – including those in the educational community -- believe these tests to have questionable educational merit and a provenance rooted in corporate profits; they resent the amount of educational time and money being consumed by testing (more than in any other nation in the world) that provides so little educational return or information. Publicly demonstrate the program’s validity and value by using established methods and quantitative means, reduce the amount of testing to developmentally-appropriate, effective and efficient levels -- and start a campaign to quell the concerns of parents and students who are literally opting out of the program through civil disobedience across the state.
4. KEEP FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION PUBLIC and don’t abandon public school children by siphoning off big dollars from the system by promoting more charter schools and offering an Education Tax Credit that allows the wealthy to dictate where their money will go and benefits students in private and religious schools directly at the expense of their public school peers – providing “parental choice” for the few to the detriment of those who don’t qualify or get to choose.
5. REESTABLISH TRUST by listening to and engaging all stakeholders, including those in the trenches who are most familiar with the needs of our state’s children; avoid taking a “one-size fits all” confrontational and punitive approach; consider what is demonstrably developmentally-appropriate for children; and use sound and thorough planning with respectful time tables when rolling-out initiatives.

The Croton-Harmon community aspires to the highest, most rigorous educational standards for its students and accountability for its staff – a staff of whom we are proud. In just this year our elementary school, Carrie E. Tompkins, was awarded a Blue Ribbon, our middle-school Assistant Principal, Michael Plotkin, was named SANYS Assistant Principal of the Year, and Croton-Harmon High School was designated Reward School. It is our deepest desire to work with you to achieve educational goals and outcomes that are meaningful, fair, transparent, sound and developmentally-appropriate for all NY public school children.

Our community is rallying together to fight back on those points of the Governor’s agenda that we believe are **poisonous to public education and harmful to students across the state**. We are united in support of those individuals who stand up for what is most beneficial for our state’s children and their educational outcomes – which of course are critical to the health of NY State and our nation.

We hope to be able to support you in a process of positive reform that will have positive outcomes.

Sincerely, *on behalf of the Croton-Harmon District and Community,*



Giuseppina Miller
President, Croton-Harmon Board of Education



Dr. Edward Fuhrman
Superintendent, Croton-Harmon School District



Ivelaw Carrington
President, Croton Teachers Association

cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo