

To: Chancellor Rosa and the Board of Regents
From: NY School Diversity Advocates
Date: June 16, 2017
Re: Comments Regarding the New York State Every Student Succeeds Act Plan

This testimony represents the consensus opinion of the undersigned advocates, researchers, educational practitioners, and representatives of national, state, and local coalitions working to achieve equitable, high-quality educational opportunities for all students in New York State.

We respectfully submit this written testimony in support of the following items that are included in New York's Every Student Succeeds Act ("ESSA") plan:¹

1. The inclusion of racial and socioeconomic integration strategies as an evidence-based intervention available to identified and targeted schools as a Title I intervention. (Currently included in plan at pages 7 and 70).²
2. The use of a school's demographic composition as a reported out accountability measure. (Currently included in plan at page 44).

As representatives of our various communities, the undersigned encourage New York to follow through with the proposed adoption of Title I interventions that support racial and socioeconomic integration in schools. To support the use of racial and socioeconomic integration strategies as Title I interventions, we suggest New York include policy flexibility, financial incentives, and guidance regarding inter-district integration strategies, particularly for communities unable to achieve meaningful integration due to high concentrations of poverty.

Additionally, to ensure proper implementation of these interventions, it is critical that New York provides support for transportation between low- and high-performing schools, and across district lines, as well as considers initiatives to boost recruitment of diverse school staff and administration. It is also important to keep in mind racial and socioeconomic integration is not beneficial only to students in identified Title I schools, but to all students, and all schools should bear responsibility for seeking integration. Furthermore, to avoid resegregating students within newly diverse schools, New York's plan should provide support for developing curricula, pedagogy, assessments, approaches to discipline, and parent and family involvement practices to engage and support all learners.

Finally, we urge New York to go further in the use of school demographics as a potential accountability tool. We believe school demographics compared against countywide

¹ "New York State's Draft Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan," New York State Department of Education (May 8, 2017), available at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/documents/draft-ny-essa-plan-may-2017.pdf>.

² On page 7 of New York's draft ESSA plan, the text reads "Use Title I School Improvement Funds to support the efforts of districts to increase diversity and reduce socio-economic and racial/ethnic diversity in schools." We believe the second appearance of the word "diversity" to be in error, and encourage the state to replace this word with "isolation."

demographics, rather than school demographics compared to district demographics,³ would be a useful accountability measure and help more accurately flag schools in need of a pro-diversity Title I intervention, and that this measure should be implemented in the initial iteration of New York's plan.

The Benefits of Diversity in Education

Diverse, equitable schools convey academic, social, and emotional benefits to students, as well as a range of potential economic, social, and democratic benefits to communities, our state, and our nation at large. Decades of research provide a comprehensive overview of the educational benefits students derive from diverse schools.⁴ Students attending diverse schools exhibit higher performance in math, science, and reading, experience more supportive school climates, have higher on-time graduation rates, and display improved critical thinking skills compared to students who attend segregated schools.⁵ Furthermore, diverse schools are better equipped to counteract the negative effects of poverty on students' academic performance, meaning integrated schools in New York could represent a significant cost savings as the state complies with the constitutional obligation to provide all students with a sound basic education.⁶

In addition to educational benefits, diverse schools could create long term economic, social, and democratic benefits for New York State. Increased graduation rates as a result of diverse educational environments will result in reduced State expenditures and increased tax revenue.⁷ Students who attend diverse schools experience higher levels of intergroup contact while in those diverse environments, and are more likely to attend diverse universities, get jobs in diverse environments, and live in diverse neighborhoods.⁸

³ Given the significantly greater degree of school segregation between, compared to within, school districts, we believe county demographics are a more useful benchmark than district demographics when judging school integration. See "School Segregation Maps, 2013-2014," (ERASE Racism, 2015) *available at* <http://eraseracismny.org/our-work/education/433>.

⁴ For a summary of this research, see Roslyn Mickelson, "School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2015), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo5.pdf>; Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2012), *available at* <http://schooldiversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>.

⁵ For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton, "School Racial and Economic Composition & Math and Science Achievement," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo1.pdf>; Susan Eaton, "How the Racial and Socioeconomic Composition of Schools and Classrooms Contributes to Literacy, Behavioral Climate, Instructional Organization and High School Graduation Rates," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo2.pdf>.

⁶ For a summary of this research, see Philip Tegeler, Roslyn Mickelson, and Martha Bottia, "What We Know about School Integration, College Attendance, and the Reduction of Poverty," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo4.pdf>.

⁷ A 2007 study shows that for every new high school graduate, the public will reap a benefit of \$209,000 in increased tax revenue and decreased government spending over the course of that graduate's lifetime. See Henry Levin et al., *The Costs and Benefits an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*, (2007), *available at*

<http://www.literacy.cooperative.org/documens/Thecostsandbenefitsofanexcellentedforamerchildren.pdf>.

⁸ For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton and Gina Chirichigno, "The Impact of Racially Diverse Schools in a Democratic Society," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at*

In a state as diverse as New York, increased intergroup contact as a result of integrated schools should result in greater understanding between citizens of different backgrounds, increasing feelings of community and making episodes of civil unrest like those recently seen in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charlotte less likely.⁹

The Necessity of Support for School Diversity in New York

New York State is home to one of the most diverse populations of public school students in the country, but ranks among the worst states in terms of the racial and socioeconomic isolation of students.¹⁰ Such segregation along racial and socioeconomic lines is “strongly related to an array of factors that limit educational opportunities and outcomes... [including] less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less successful peer groups and inadequate facilities and learning materials.”¹¹ New York has an opportunity to use the ESSA planning process to develop approaches to school accountability and intervention measures to address the pernicious problem of student segregation, which undergirds many of the State’s more visible education problems like the achievement gap and the school to prison pipeline.

At a time when students cannot count on forward-thinking federal policy in support of voluntary, community-led school integration,¹² state and local governments have the opportunity to become national leaders on this critical issue; vocal support and visible leadership around the critical importance of school integration from the highest levels of state government are of paramount importance. The actions New York is considering in

<http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo3.pdf>. Graduates of diverse schools are highly sought after in the workplace for skills developed through exposure to diverse educational settings. See “Brief of Fortune -100 and Other Leading American Businesses as *amici curiae* in Support of Respondents in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*,” November 2, 2015, available at <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/14-981-bsac-Fortune-100-and-Other-Leading-Businesses-In-Support-of-Respo....pdf> (“people who have been educated in a diverse setting make valuable contributions to the workforce in several important ways. Such graduates have an increased ability to facilitate unique and creative approaches to problem-solving by integrating different perspectives and moving beyond linear, conventional thinking...”).

⁹ *Supra* note 4, see also Al Ramiah A, Hewstone M. (2013). “Intergroup contact as a tool for reducing, resolving, and preventing intergroup conflict: evidence, limitations, and potential.” 68 *Am Psychol*, 7, 527–42.

¹⁰ Gary Orfield & John Kucsera, *New York State’s Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future* (Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2014), available at <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/ny-norflet-reportplaceholder/Kucsera-New-York-Extreme-Segregation-2014.pdf>.

¹¹ Gary Orfield et al., *E Pluribus... Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students* (Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2012), 21, available at http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/epluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-morestudents/orfield_epluribus_revised_omplete_2012.pdf.

¹² See Emma Brown, “Trump’s Education Department nixes Obama-era grant program for school diversity,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2017, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2017/03/29/trumps-education-department-nixesobama-era-grant-program-for-school-diversity/>.

support of integration and equity for all students, if faithfully executed, could blaze a trail for the rest of the nation to follow.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet and consult with the Chancellor and members of the New York State Board of Regents regarding the state's proposed ESSA plan, as well as the benefits of student diversity more generally. Please do not hesitate to contact us to schedule a mutually convenient time to meet.

Sincerely,

Michael Hilton, Policy Counsel
Poverty & Race Research Action Council

David Tipson, Executive Director
Matt Gonzales, School Diversity Project Director
New York Appleseed

Jonathan Feldman, Senior Staff Attorney
Empire Justice Center

Elaine Gross, President
Nyah Berg, Education Equity Organizer
ERASE Racism

Ann LoBue, Board Trustee
Mamaroneck Union Free School District

John Wilkinson, Co-Convener
Lynette Sparks, Co-Convener
Great Schools for All (Rochester)