

## **Elementary & Secondary Education Budget Hearing**

Testimony of Tenicka Boyd, Parent & Director of Organizing, StudentsFirstNY

Tuesday, February 3, 2015

Thank you Chairman Flanagan and Nolan for giving me an opportunity to speak today. My name is Tenicka Boyd and I am public school parent and the Director of Organizing for StudentsFirstNY.

StudentsFirstNY is New York's leading voice for students. As part of our community organizing efforts, we have talked to over 300,000 New Yorkers in predominately low-income communities and communities of color who are deeply concerned with the lack of quality schools and quality teachers available to their children.

I am here, not only as a New York City district school parent, but also as someone who talks to parents each and every day. And I not only support the Governor's Opportunity Agenda, I believe it is something that many parents, in the communities that we serve, strongly support.

I want to open up with the real story of education in New York.

Have you ever heard a 16 year old that reads at a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level? I had a high school student who came to our office because he was terrified that he might not graduate and be able to read like "a senior." He, a young Black male, from a family who also graduated from this New York City high school, told me about low expectations, poor quality lessons, and countless stories of years of inadequate teaching. All he ever wanted he told me was to "read like the kids in Westchester."

And we talk to kids like this, in Brooklyn, each and every day.

There are, in New York City alone, over 143,000 students legally zoned to historically and persistently failing schools. We have schools in New York City where less than 13% of Black males are graduating and can read on grade level. In 43% of all New York City middle schools, 90% of the children are failing. 114 high schools in New York City are producing students who, if they do graduate, have to take years of remedial coursework because they are often times years behind. In districts like Brownsville, a historically Black community in Brooklyn, there is not a single district elementary school that has educated more than 20% of its kids to read at grade level.

That is criminal.

"New York spends more per pupil than any other state and double the national average, and yet we still fail to give students in Brownsville quality teachers who are supported and have the proper tools to succeed."

We've heard from Mike Mulgrew and Karen Magee – teacher union leaders who say the Governor has gone too far. It's the job of union leaders to protect their lowest performing  
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members. I get it, but the teachers union is a special interest and cannot parade around like they are putting the interests of students first.

In a City with failing schools, in many of the communities that serve our students, it is outlandish to think the Governor is going too far. It is outlandish to think, when the outcomes for many of these children is prison or teen pregnancy that this is a war on teachers. This isn't a war on teachers. This is a fight for students. This is a fight for an education that can open the gateway to opportunity.

When students in high poverty communities are three times as likely to be taught by an unsatisfactory teacher than a student in a low poverty community, this is a fight for equity.

This is the real story that parents like me, parents like AU, and the parents I talk to each and every day have to face. Not the same tired story that we hear day in and day out from the teachers union that uses money and history of influence to have us believe that the students are too hungry, too tired, and too misbehaved to pay attention in class, to pass an exam, or to read or write at grade level.

Not only are we in a crisis, we have failed generations of students and their parents, with policies that have sought to provide more comfort for the adults than quality education for the students.

What we know is that a quality teacher is the biggest in-school predictor of a child's success. More important than the amount of money we spend and more important than the number of kids in a classroom. We know that students who are consistently assigned to high quality teachers have a higher chance of going to college, and earn a higher salary.

Yet we have schools with the highest number of minority children, with the highest rates of poverty, and with the lowest college readiness rates, with the most undesirable teachers.

The governor's plan will fix that. Governor Cuomo's plan wants to ensure that our highest need students get the very best teachers. He wants to ensure that no student, in any part of this state, is taught by two unsatisfactory teachers in a row. The governor is seeking to incentivize our already great teachers to ensure they stay in the system longer and in communities that need them the most.

For far too long we have all succumbed to this notion that more money will save us. When the truth is, more money has not led to better results. We need to hold the adults in this system accountable for the failure to educate our students.

I strongly encourage you to take this testimony into account when you are making decisions on the education of our students. I hope as an elected body, with the desire to stand up for what's right, you really put students first by supporting wholeheartedly the Governor's plan.

Thank you.