



I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and offer more context and for the challenges facing New York’s Black and Brown families living in low-income communities. My name is Jacquelyn Martell and I have the pleasure of being the Executive Director of Education Reform Now - New York. At ERN New York, one of our key, foundational pillars is to ensure students in New York receive high quality education regardless of their identity, zip-code and other factors that may be a barrier for them to achieve a sustainable education. The fact is, right now in New York, too many students are receiving a high-quality or equitable education and that is cheating them of successful post-secondary achievement and employment.

This starts with New York providing more educational choices to children with the highest needs. These are the students who are being left behind. Governor Hochul understands this and has rightfully called for increasing opportunities for these families, eliminating the geographic cap on New York City charter schools. We must do better for our kids and it starts with raising the charter cap for the City of New York.

Our affiliate, Democrats for Education Reform - New York recently polled hundreds of NYC parents – with diverse backgrounds and it is clear that school choice is what they want. They do not want to be limited to an option that is not fitting to their child’s needs, and educational trajectory. As a former public school student my entire life, I had to travel hours just to attain an education that my parents believed was necessary to advance in life. This wasn’t the case for some of my family members. I was one of the lucky ones, but due to an arbitrary cap on public charter schools in New York City, so many families living in marginalized communities don’t have that opportunity.

You don’t have to just take my word for it — there’s data to back it up. Here are the thoughts of New York City parents, families, Democrats and students when asked if they support the lifting of the charter school cap in NY:

New York City Democrats favor lifting the cap by 51% to 27%. The margins for Hispanics (53% to 26%) and African-American New Yorkers (48% to 23%) are more than 2 to 1 in favor. Nearly two-thirds of parents (64%) support raising the cap. While 64% of respondents who identify as Parents (+41) support a cap raise as well.

These are real New Yorkers. New Yorkers who care about the future of our state. When nearly two-third of parents want to increase the number of public charter cap it shows we have to offer more choices. Members of the New York Legislature: I call on you to heed these parents' calls



and actually understand the necessities, nuances and issues of your community specific to education.

We also support Governor Hochul's proposal to open 'zombie' charter schools that have been restricted from opening because of divisive policies. The renewal of these charters allows parents and students to have even more choice on already pre approved institutions, which will make a tremendous change in the lives of marginalized students.

Beyond the issue of improving parent choice, we also support offering more high-impact tutoring. So much learning was lost during the height of the pandemic, due to a variety of reasons, but there's no question that New York's struggling communities suffered the most, specifically the children. They lost valuable time in the classroom to develop social and emotional skills, but also time to learn. While there's no magic bullet to recover that lost learning, study after study has shown that high-impact tutoring can significantly help. Studies show that students have lost close to two decades of meaningful learning. How can NY students truly compete with students from other states when they are left with low resources to advance and reach career readiness?

Governor Hochul has stated her support for high-impact tutoring programs as it shows clear, positive results, particularly for students in need of the most academic support. Students participating in these programs have gained an additional one to two years of math and an additional year of learning in English language arts—on top of what they learned in the classroom—compared to nonparticipants. As an organization devoted to equitable access, we hope the members of the state legislature will adopt a mechanism rooted in research, high quality instruction and teachers/tutors, frequent and close-knit sessions, and a diverse pool of instructors.

We also call for the Assembly and State Senate to further the teacher retention rate specifically for those of marginalized backgrounds. The demographics of those who are employed and the students in districts, is not representative. We implore you all to understand the truths: Teachers of color make up less than 25% of the education workforce statewide while students from the same groups comprise up to 53% of the state's student population. Although outcomes are more proportional in NYC (42% of teachers are BIPOC, 80% of the students are BIPOC), there needs to be legislative push to make sure all 5 bills from last session are restored and pass through the chambers. There's plenty of research that shows when students of color are taught by teachers who look like them, suspensions drop and academics soar. New York must do a better job to recruit and retain teachers of color. We also need to make sure school leadership represents the



students as well. To that end, ERN supports high quality charters led by leaders of color by providing opportunities for equitable facilities funding.

Raising the cap on public charter schools, offering more high-impact tutoring and increasing teacher diversity: these are the priorities that will help improve outcomes for New York students, from Buffalo to the Bronx. New York must invest more in our children's future and focus on what works. Charter Schools offer families more high quality options. High-impact tutoring improves academic outcomes. And teacher diversity helps children adapt socially, emotionally and academically. We look forward to working with you on each of these three key items which we believe will improve student outcomes and the future of education in New York.