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## **Campaign for Fiscal Equity and Alliance for Quality Education Testimony on New York City Contract for Excellence Plan**

1. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) law suit was brought 14 years ago, and established the constitutional right for every public school child in New York to a sound basic education through the provision of adequate resources targeted to the neediest students, invested in strategies that work, with strong accountability, transparency and public participation.
2. To ensure this right, CFE, the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) and a broad-based coalition of parents, educators, concerned citizens and elected officials worked with the Governor, the legislature and the State Department of Education to enact legislation and provide regulations to turn CFE law into CFE reality.
3. New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) Contracts for Excellence (citywide and for 32 community school districts) must provide specific plans for \$258 million to be spent in 5 areas: class size reduction; full day pre-k; teacher and principal quality initiatives; middle and high school restructuring; and more time on task. \$228 million must go to new or expanded programs, and \$30 million may go to maintain existing contract programs. NYCDoE must also produce a 5 year class size reduction plan.
4. NYCDoE proposed citywide contract provides only broad-brush overarching policy proposals, but lacks the specificity and transparency to enable the public to understand where and how the money will be spent. Further, the 32 community school district plans are merely summarized on an expenditure chart. To hold the system accountable, there must be baseline data and specificity in describing the targets, schools, programs and students served in all 5 program areas.
5. **CFE funds must serve the neediest students.** NYCDoE has proposed sending \$133 million through Fair Student Funding (FSF) to 693 schools. While a large portion of the funds are going to needy students and low performing schools, there are a substantial number of schools receiving funds that do not fit this profile. There are also needy students and low performing schools not included in this list. The information provided regarding the funding of underperforming schools is confusing, and raises concerns about prioritizing the neediest. For example, we are told that 41% of the funds are going to underperforming SINI/SRAP and SURR schools. We are then told that 60 underperforming schools are to be closed. We are also told that 20 SINI/SRAP schools are to be closed, and there is a plan to build 40 new schools to replace these and other failing schools. It is not clear how all these figures relate. We need a clear explanation on how the neediest are served with simple school based accounting.
6. **Meaningful 5-year Class Size Reduction Plan.** NYCDoE states it will spend \$106 million on class size reduction, \$66 million as part of FSF. Goals built on system-wide averages and downward trends along with coaching don't tell parents and the public how class size will actually be reduced. There are no specifics regarding particular targets in particular schools. We need specific school and class

baseline data so that we can measure progress. We want to partner with the Department in determining how that baseline should be determined. We agree that the change in policy regarding enrollment targets is a positive step, and that targeting the neediest high schools for special attention is moving in the right direction. This latter also requires more specificity. We also want to ensure that sufficient provision is made of full day pre-k. Finally, the link to the capital plan and the building of new schools must be more specific.

7. **Middle Schools are the weakest link, and must be addressed.** Less than half of NYC 8th graders can read, write and do math at the state standard. In East Brooklyn, Harlem and the South Bronx, fewer than 1 in 4 students can read and write on state standard. There is a 45 point achievement gap based on income. In middle schools that serve the most students in poverty, only 29% of students meet state standards in reading and writing, compared to 74% of students in schools that serve the highest-income students. More than half of the 50 lowest-performing middle grade schools are receiving NO new Fair Student Funding money. The 50 lowest-performing middle grade schools are receiving, on average, only \$66,000 in new Fair Student Funding money. In April, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein committed to make a good faith effort to implement the soon to be released NYC Council Middle School plan in at least 50 schools. The NYCDoe refers to middle and high school restructuring efforts outside the Contract. We want assurance that the task force plan will be implemented with CFE funds or a specific commitment of additional funds.
8. **More Time on Task.** The proposal to use CFE funds for both assessment and programs to increase personalization and more time on task requires further specificity on program and baseline data as well.
9. **Full Day Pre-K.** Research leaves no doubt that full day pre-k leads to improved outcomes, and is beneficial for both students and parents. NYC has trouble filling half day slots. The Mayor and the Chancellor have repeatedly stated that full-day pre-k is a priority. We appreciate their efforts in taking steps with the new formula and other funds. We seek a long-term strategy to fund full day pre-k as part of the Contract.
10. **Accountability on the Total New Investment.** The CFE decision resulted in over \$1 billion new dollars for NYCDoe from combined state and city resources this year. We want NYCDoe to account for how the total new infusion of dollars satisfies the constitutional purpose.
11. **Public Participation.** We are gratified that NYCDoe is holding public hearings in 5 boroughs. However we are concerned that the proposed plan was released at close of business Thursday, July 5, for hearings running July 9-12, to be submitted to the State on July 15. In this first year, we are operating under a short timeframe, but this process does not allow for real deliberation on issues of great import and complexity.
12. The proposed Contract raises more questions than it answers. We will submit further questions for the record, and call on the department to provide more detailed explanations down to the school level so that these plans can be effectively utilized this year. We will also seek further time in the approval process with the state.