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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
FROM: Dr. Julie Davis Lutz, Co-Chair
Dr. Walter F. Schartner, Co-Chair
DATE: February 5, 2015
RE: Education Reform

We write to assure you that as superintendents of public schools, we strongly believe in the importance and power of public education for all children. While the vast majority of our students are successful, we will not rest until all students are supported and given the needed resources to be successful. We want to ensure, as you do, that students graduating from our public schools are college and career ready. We believe that this is an important component to creating a skilled workforce ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of a global economy. Public support for growing a skilled workforce is an essential element for any economic development strategy, and in turn, key to improving the economy and tax base of New York State.

We are at a historical juncture in New York State public education. After more than four years of efforts to reform our educational system, there is little evidence that things are moving in the right direction. However, there is ample evidence that the faith of the public in public education and the morale of educators is at an all-time low. We appreciate the efforts of your office to seek input from the State Education Department about how to alter the course of the reform movement moving forward. We also appreciate your demonstrated ability to listen, as evidenced by the support you showed in some of your responses from the State Education Department in your State of the State address. However, we believe emphatically that it is critical for the future of public education in New York State for you to hear from all stakeholders. As superintendents, we implore you to create an independent commission to include all of the stakeholder voices: school board members, teachers, superintendents, business and industry partners, etc., to develop a thoughtful correction of, and improvement to, the educator evaluation process that was forced into implementation.

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Several years ago, we were forced into a system of change that was a political football, in order to get funding to run our schools. The present situation will lead to nothing different than the last time hasty reform decisions needed to be made in order to receive basic operating aid. Well-reasoned reforms to a system need time and the investment of stakeholders. You have our investment; what you do not have is the time before April 1 to do this right. The result will be shallow, politically-based reforms that are hastily implemented. The cost is that our results will yield more of the same.

In the meantime, we are all committed and obligated to continue to provide a free appropriate public education to every student in New York State who walks through our doors. An important part of that process is creating a budget with community input and approval that allows us to do that. In order to meet that obligation, it is critical that we have accurate information about what school aid we will receive. We implore you to release the school aid runs immediately so that we can continue with that process in a way that allows us to maintain the integrity of the budget development process and the trust of our communities.

We stand together and we stand committed to do the important work that we have dedicated our lives to. We look forward to doing that work with you moving forward.

JDL/WFS/mp
c: SCSSA Members

Sent via E-mail and U.S. Mail