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Recently, Governor Cuomo publicized a report titled “The State of New York’s Failing Schools 2015 Report,” which was headlined in his widely broadcasted email as “New York’s Failing Schools.” In his opening paragraph, he noted that more than 109,000 students are currently enrolled in New York State’s 178 “failing” schools, and that Suffolk County is represented in these totals by 1,198 students from two “failing” schools. He used this data to provide a justification for pushing forward, with great urgency, his educational reform package, a package tied to the release of essential state aid information needed to develop school budgets for 2015-16. We respectfully request that the Governor release the state aid runs immediately so that the work of accurate budget development can be completed.

Using the Governor’s own identifying data as the structure for defining “failing” schools, the reality is that in Suffolk County, more than 249,350 students in 343 schools are in fact succeeding. Many are even going beyond succeeding and are excelling on state, regional and national levels. While we all continue to strive for 100 percent success for all students, more than 99 percent of Suffolk County’s schools are *not* “failing”, and more than 99 percent of Suffolk County’s students are enrolled in schools *not* designated as “failing.” This remarkable achievement, which the Governor seems to have overlooked, should not be diminished or denied. Our schools are a source of pride to Suffolk County and should be a source of pride in New York State as well.

Suffolk County is certainly not the only county in the state that can take great pride in knowing its public schools are not designated, using the Governor’s own criteria, as “failing.” The justification that Governor Cuomo uses to tie his education reform to the release of essential school aid data is unprecedented and not even supported by his own data. His decision to withhold critical state aid data not only impedes school districts from developing accurate budgets for the upcoming school year, but also indicates a disregard for the importance of the school budgeting process and a disrespect for taxpayers across the state.

On Feb. 5, 2015, the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association wrote to Governor Cuomo, proposing that an independent commission be created that will be charged with designing well-reasoned reforms. Budget development work is immediate and essential to supporting successful schools. Reform work, while also immediate, should be commenced once budget development is finalized to ensure that hasty reform compromises, which we experienced just a few years ago, do not once again become our reality.

We will commit our time to the commission; we commit our support to processes that improve public education and student success. To quote the Governor: “Our students deserve nothing less.”

