



PUBLIC EDUCATION MATTERS!
Leadership, Leverage, and Learning

A vision for reclaiming the promise of our public schools

Presented by the superintendents of New York's school districts



PREAMBLE

Every child in New York deserves the best public schools possible.

Public education is the backbone, heart, wisdom and soul of a free and democratic society. It nurtures a hopeful future and infinite possibilities for all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, color, creed, gender, beliefs, personal orientations, economic situation or learning needs.

For centuries, public schools have prepared an educated citizenry. From the beginning, learning has been the backbone of our nation's development. By Constitutional amendment, law, and judicial review we have made inclusive public education a pillar of our democracy. It has been the great informer, the great stimulator, and the great equalizer. Just as the Statue of Liberty exemplifies our mission to educate every child in our diverse state and nation, our comprehensive system of education for all students stands as an exemplar for the rest of the world.

As the international landscape changes rapidly and America strives to maintain its political and economic leadership, the need to strengthen and broaden the education of our students becomes more acute. Content knowledge is still necessary, but no longer sufficient. Success in today's world requires students to be agile thinkers, astute problem finders and clever problem solvers; to develop curiosity, perseverance, tenacity, and imagination; and to work collaboratively, effectively, and respectfully with others.

Superintendents who have walked in the shoes of teachers, principals, and district leaders are the primary agents of this necessary change and the conduit between research and practice. As superintendents charged with its oversight, we are honored to be associated with this great endeavor, humbled to walk in the footsteps of those who have accepted this responsibility before us, and determined as we lead into the future.

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**Public Education—
*the backbone, heart, wisdom,
beacon, and soul of a free and
democratic society for every child.***

PUBLIC EDUCATION

- » Equalizes and expands opportunities for all children.
- » Serves as a way out of poverty.
- » Accepts the responsibility that every student graduates prepared for continued learning in college, a career and public service, and in citizenship and life.
- » Provides intellectual capital to sustain national security and economic growth.
- » Promotes, exemplifies, and protects constitutional ideals, democratic principles and individual freedom.



WHY NOW?

Unprecedented levels of discord currently exist in New York State over the direction of education reform. School leaders and policy makers are being confronted with a level of questioning and criticism of state policies governing instruction and assessment at a level unparalleled in recent memory.

The goal of the Regents' Reform Agenda – improve learning for all students in New York State – has strong support in the education community. In October 2013, the New York State Education Conference Board (ECB)¹ reaffirmed this support in a document titled *Common Ground for the Common Core: Let's Get it Right – Move the Common Core Back on Track*.

Although the goal has been embraced by many educators, the rushed and problematic implementation of the reform has contributed significantly to the emotional tide of discontent sweeping New York State.

Superintendents bring urgency to the implementation of educational reform every day in every corner of the state. However, we know that urgency does not absolve us from approaching the challenge in a systemic way. Quick fixes which only address today's issues will not last; whereas systems developed from research with a focus on identifying the root cause of problems will.

This call to action emphasizes a systemic approach, the removal of artificial barriers to success, and presents a vision for public education every child deserves.

We must reclaim our obligation to every child, to society, and to the future.

Our shared vision is every child's academic success, development of character, pursuit of happiness, and contribution to society; all nurtured in equitably funded public schools and grounded in the principles of democracy and the American dream.

1. ECB Member Groups include: Conference of Big 5 School Districts, NYS Association of School Business Officials, NYS Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc., NYS Council of School Superintendents, NYS United Teachers, School Administrators Association of NYS.

Attaining this vision requires: 1) children entering school ready to learn; 2) talented teachers and school leaders; 3) rigorous and developmentally appropriate academic standards, rich curriculum and informed, innovative, technology-infused teaching; 4) modern, progressive and proven approaches to authority, accountability, and regulation; and 5) schools as learning organizations characterized by professionalism, inclusion, and equal access.

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Dozens of federal, state, foundation, and professional organization commissioned reports and “vision statements” are built on these same basic yet critical elements. Simply, there is nothing new or revolutionary to portray. We seek not to redefine vision but to bring it to life; we seek and envision statewide systemic change, engaged voices from the field, and bold, local leadership.





PUBLIC SCHOOLS MATTER

Public schools matter for every child, for our local communities, New York, our nation, our economy, our democracy, and our future.

As public school leaders, our mission is clear: to educate all students who attend our schools, irrespective of academic, social and physical abilities, socio-economic status, and/or native language.

We accept this responsibility as a covenant between us and the communities we serve.

Public schools teach every child.

Public schools are the foundation of a free society where equality and justice are our most important pillars. Public schools foster an environment that embraces, celebrates, and accommodates diversity. Subsequently, public education matters as it is the only entity dedicated to providing equity and access to that which nurtures every child's ability to think, contribute, and participate in our democracy.

Public schools perpetuate our democracy.

Perpetuation of democracy is grounded in our history's promise of public education, a promise which instills students with solid values supporting democratic responsibilities, principles, and expectations. Public schools are a reflection of our communities and our society. Our future will be a reflection of the quality of public education.

Public schools expand opportunity.

Dedicated to teaching the core academic disciplines and the capacity for thinking, creating and caring, public schools identify and respond to each child's true individual needs, capacities and talents. In a society that is increasingly complex, fragmented, global and technological, the promise of a public education matters because it equalizes and advances opportunities for all.

*Our future will be a reflection
of the quality of public education.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Access and Equity – All children deserve...

- » Birth to five experiences and language exposure to enable them to begin school ready to learn.
- » Access to a high quality public education resourced appropriately and equitably.
- » Safe and secure learning environments where physical and mental health needs are addressed appropriately.
- » Professional teachers with the passion, talent, preparation, skills and enduring mission to enhance every child's learning and success in school.
- » Public schools that are governed locally and democratically yet held accountable to local citizens and the State.
- » Superintendents and school leaders whose primary interests are children and leading the effective, systemic collaboration of all adults responsible for every aspect of a child's education.

Scholarship – All children deserve...

- » Inspired, high quality direct and project-based instruction and authentic formative and summative assessments.
- » To pursue a range of interests that demonstrate a balance of intellectual, interpersonal, physical, and self-expressive skills.
- » To engage their innate passion and curiosity through analytical thinking, innovation, imagination, and teamwork with the goal of solving real world problems and fully developing their unique talents.



- » A 21st century curriculum aligned with professionally developed standards and rigorous coursework, benchmarked through valid and reliable standardized testing.
- » To be challenged to meet rigorous graduation standards and to set and achieve their individual learning goals.
- » To be well-prepared for college, a career, continued learning, service, citizenship, and life.

Citizenship – All children deserve...

- » To live an independent adult life contributing to their community, nation, and the global society.
- » To practice citizenship and service and embrace a sense of hopefulness.
- » To be socially competent, understand their connections to others, appreciate interdependence as a key to success, and value and live by democratic principles.
- » Schools where parents, educators, and community members exemplify policy making and decision making through public engagement, collaboration, and civility.



WE ENVISION...

In schools:

- » Every child entering school ready to learn and to graduate with the acquisition, application, and creation of knowledge, skills, and principled dispositions.
- » Curriculum that guides planning and instruction of meaningful academic units, lessons, and learning experiences; supports individualized and modified instruction; and guides assessment through authentic, performance-based tasks and measures.
- » Teaching that establishes the foundations of literacy and core knowledge, fosters creativity and innovation, passion and curiosity, perseverance and tenacity, self-regulated learning and a life-long quest for knowledge.

In school districts:

- » Curriculum, written and/or selected locally, emanating from standards of rigorous intellectual thinking that include an academic core, the arts, physical fitness, and career opportunities; and that are established by professional organizations of practitioners and academics.
- » Teachers and administrators, all of whom are talented and scholarly professionals supported by a system of continuous professional growth, renewal, and accountability and a modern, collaborative determination of management principles and compensation.
- » Superintendents, principals, and school leaders who embrace a lifetime commitment to the education of all children; create schools that ensure the achievement and fulfill the sense of belonging of every child; and engage in the thoughtful application of sound research, scholarship and reflective practice.
- » Local school boards which provide a valuable and constructive balance to the power of state and national policy-makers.
- » Parents and communities that are engaged, well-informed, supportive, and connected to the shared responsibility of educating children.



In our region, New York, and the Nation:

- » A strong Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) regional model as a hub of coordinated support and efficient regional programming, operations, shared services and professional development.
- » A State Education Department that engages public educators in the collaborative development of standards, benchmarks and a constructive and comprehensive system of support and accountability, and provides support, service, and resources to local districts.
- » A state legislature and executive branch of government that provides adequate and equitable resources and attends to the expertise of professionals, the input of all constituents, and research and practice-based solutions.
- » A Federal government that concentrates predominantly on the civil rights of students and on equity of opportunity, as well as the resources to ensure both.
- » An array of professional educational organizations which support teachers, administrators, schools, and policy makers in research, development, and practice.



LEADERSHIP

Superintendents: Experience, Reason, and Results

As superintendents, we make an enduring, lifelong professional commitment to every child's learning and well-being, the perpetuation of our democracy, and the future of our communities.

We will continue to work tirelessly, inspired by hope and the highest of expectations for all children; guided by Constitutional, educational, and democratic principles; and determined to identify and eliminate obstacles to this work. Then, and only then, will we bring forth a New York public education system worthy of each child, of all children, of our democracy, and our future.

We accept our responsibility and moral imperative to

- » Be stewards of public education, students, and all constituencies.
- » Make ethical decisions in the best interests of every child and all children.
- » Lead, engage and systemically guide the interests, research, expectations, and viewpoints of parents, academics, professionals, and policy makers in the best interests of every child.
- » Marshal human, fiscal, and community resources to ensure access and equity, scholarship, and citizenship in our public school communities in the interest of every child.

We reject the platform of constituencies representing

- » Policy or practice which perpetuates segregation, isolation, or limited access to equitable resources and opportunities of students based on race, creed, religion, economic situation, geography, gender, sexual orientation, English proficiency, or disability.
- » Self-serving interests; narrowness and negativity; and untested, unprincipled remedies.
- » Political and economic forces which distort educational policy and place core democratic principles at risk.



- » Ideology, practices, or beliefs of any bent that attempt to infiltrate the governance and leadership of public schools for their own political, financial, or ideological benefit.
- » Strategies that usurp equity, access, scholarship, and citizenship with intended and unintended consequences that do not put children first.

We call on policy makers, academics, and practitioners to join us and

- » Reach consensus with educators and communities on guiding principles, establish capacity for sustainability, and lead to leverage systemic change.
- » Cease acting in the wrong places, on that which is not supported by research and practice, and with practice not ready for implementation.
- » Dismantle longstanding obstacles.
- » Envision and enact policy, frameworks, and practices that realize the American dream and a remarkable future for every child.



LEVERAGING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Our Mandate, Our Charge, Our Call to Action

Leverage!

- » Grasp thoughtful, well-researched, systemic change and methodical implementation.
- » Critically assess every major initiative to determine if it has a basis in research and successful practice and evaluate the cost-benefit and effectiveness of each.
- » Develop policy and provide “bully pulpit” support to change outdated regulations and inflexible practices.
- » Employ modern, respectful, and professional means of management and accountability.
- » Fund that which supports equity, high academic standards, and dynamic learning opportunities for every child in New York – regardless of zip code.
- » Encourage positive and optimistic perceptions of public education.
- » Insist on professionalism and professional growth to achieve high levels of student achievement and accountability.
- » Dispel myths and resist actions which threaten inclusive schools, innovative practice, and public education for all.
- » Acknowledge and act on research, professional experience, and common sense.

Lead!

- » Identify and address root causes of school and student failure.
- » Support early childhood school readiness programs and parent education.
- » Eliminate poverty and provide adequate, equitable funding, resources and opportunities.
- » Enhance innovation in instruction and innovation by children.



- » Invest in substantive professional development.
- » Collaborate with local agencies to establish community schools and complementary non-educational services
- » Support and empower state and local governance to maximize efficiencies, validate standards, and preserve local culture.

As public school superintendents, our children, our democracy, and our future are our mission – and our responsibility. Our professional organization, the New York State Council of School Superintendents, has led the development of this document and stands ready to support the superintendents of the state in embracing its challenge.



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