



TESTIMONY OF NYC SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA
ON STRUGGLING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL RECEIVERSHIP
BEFORE THE STATE ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 14, 2015

Good morning, Assembly Education Committee Chair Cathy Nolan and distinguished Assembly Members, and all the members of the State Legislature here today. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on New York City’s work to turn around our struggling schools. Seated with me is Christopher Caruso, Executive Director of the Office of Community Schools at the New York City Department of Education (DOE), and Melissa Harris, DOE’s Executive Director of Policy and Planning.

As you are aware, the new State Receivership law requires that “Persistently Struggling Schools” be given an initial one-year period to improve student performance, and “Struggling Schools” be given an initial two-year period to improve student performance. The State Education Department designated 62 New York City schools as Struggling or Persistently Struggling, which requires them to be placed in receivership under my direction as Chancellor.

As a lifelong educator, I take my responsibility of serving the students and families of New York City schools seriously. I am particularly committed to the needs of students attending struggling schools, which is why we are taking real action to turn these schools around.

As part of this Administration’s commitment to ensure that all of our students receive a high-quality education regardless of their zip code, last November, Mayor Bill de Blasio launched the Renewal School program, which included a \$150 million commitment to provide unprecedented resources to turnaround 94 of our most challenged schools. Fifty of the 62 state-designated Struggling and Persistently Struggling Schools are in the City’s Renewal Program. The remaining 12 are receiving similar resources and all 62 benefit from State-mandated supports.

Renewal Schools are implementing significant interventions to accelerate student performance and help close achievement gaps. Those interventions include an additional five hours of expanded learning time; working with partner community-based organizations to provide rich after-school programming; and, increased professional development for school leaders, teachers and other school-based staff through coaches and partnerships with institutions such as Teachers College at Columbia University. Additionally, each Renewal School is now a Community School, offering wraparound services to our students and their families.

All Elementary Renewal Schools will administer the Gates MacGinitie Assessment to all second and sixth graders to determine a student’s level of reading achievement, a diagnostic assessment that focuses on overall reading ability, and specifically on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. The assessment will identify areas of strength and need requiring intervention. Academic Intervention professional development for Renewal Schools will be tailored to



the Gates diagnostic findings, and professional development will be provided by AIS Specialist Dr. Eileen Marzola and DOE AIS Department specialists.

The education reforms in the Renewal School Program have a strong record of driving improvement. First, strong, effective leadership is critical in initiating and sustaining turnaround efforts in struggling schools. Since the launch of the Renewal School Program, we have dispatched teams of experienced principals and assistant principals to strengthen leadership and to provide expertise these schools need to help change direction. Where it is needed, we have and will continue to replace school leadership to help transform a school and boost student achievement.

Second, increased high-quality professional development provides teachers and principals targeted support to develop their craft and improve classroom instruction practices. We are investing in deepening teachers' skills through professional development at every grade.

Third, expanded learning time extends the school day by one hour each day and enables struggling schools to create more time for core subject instruction, tailored academic support for students' unique needs, and enrichment activities provided in collaboration with community partners. Schools now have a more seamless school day that reinforces core subject material while providing students with helpful strategies and services that support active learning.

Finally, the Community School model, which incorporates academic and social services into the school environment, provides services to students and communities beyond the classroom needs, with the goal of helping students focus and stay on task during the school day.

To oversee these efforts we established the Office of Community Schools and the Office of Renewal Schools. We also hired a team of district-based Directors of School Renewal (DSR) to support Renewal schools. DSRs participate in monthly professional development sessions. These professional development sessions focus on building capacity and facility in the areas of continuous school improvement processes, instructional and leadership coaching, data driven progress monitoring, and establishing systems and structures for sharing best practices within and across their schools.

All Community Schools in the City have been matched with a lead community-based organization and have hired a community school director - a new leader in the school whose primary responsibility is to coordinate partnerships and interventions.

Through these partnerships, we are able to provide more time for learning, academic support, enrichment activities, health services and more. For example, some schools might have a food pantry so that hunger does not distract from learning. Others schools might have a physician's office on site to keep kids healthy so they do not miss school. Still others might offer English classes for families so parents can help kids with their homework. We are confident that these interventions and new programs will make this school year and those to come successful experiences, which will drive student achievement in our struggling schools.



I had the opportunity to see the good work being done with our Community Schools in partnership with our Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Last month, I visited the Renaissance School of the Arts (RSA) in East Harlem with Christopher Caruso, and spoke with Principal Brian Bradley, who enlisted two terrific CBOs, which support RSA as a Community School. The CBOs, Partnership for Children and Citizen Schools, are providing a number of student supports and a robust set of expanded learning time opportunities.

On our visit, we were very impressed with how the Citizen Schools team of AmeriCorps service members offers students additional academic support through “Citizen Teacher” volunteers and “apprenticeships,” which provide hands-on learning opportunities. This year, Renaissance students will learn how to code with Google and Girls Who Code volunteers, study the brain and neurological disorders with NYU School of Medicine students, and practice cartooning with teaching artists from Creative Art Works.

Through the apprenticeships, students will be able to make college and career connections by ensuring that they are exposed to caring adults in a variety of professions while simultaneously practicing 21st century skills such as innovation, problem solving, and communication. In addition to the CBO’s support, the teachers at RSA have also infused literacy throughout the school day by strategically leveraging the Middle School Quality Initiative.

We are closely tracking indicators that schools are moving in the right direction. Across Districts 1-32, attendance has increased from 91.5 percent in the 2013-14 school year to 92.1 percent in the 2014-15 school year and is at an all-time high. Chronic absenteeism has decreased from 21.7 percent to 20.4 percent during the same period. Among both Renewal and Receivership schools, Chronic Absenteeism dropped slightly from 25.3 percent in 2013-14 to 23.9 percent in 2014-15. Citywide, we also saw a modest test score improvement over the past year, and while I am proud of this, we have so much work to do to ensure every child is reading on grade level and every student is graduating as a productive member of society.

In order for these initiatives to succeed, they must be adequately funded. This year’s City budget commits an additional investment of \$34 million, and \$60 million every year thereafter to bring unprecedented resources to support Renewal, Community and Persistently Struggling schools.

As you are aware, the 2009 *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* settlement called on the State to fully fund all public schools adequately. However, the State has not met its court-ordered obligations under the lawsuit. Last school year alone, New York City public school students were shortchanged some \$2.6 billion in State education funds.

We are pleased and appreciative of all the support the State legislature has given to the City, providing us with a historic level of additional school aid for this school year. We look forward to working with you and doing more to ensure that our school communities have adequate and equitable funding from the State to help reduce class sizes as well as hire even more arts teachers and guidance counselors in schools throughout the system.

Ensuring families are actively engaged in this work is critical. This summer we knocked on the doors of 35,000 families of Renewal School students to tell them what it meant for their school to be a Community School. We held family nights in all Community Schools in September to welcome families back to school, and get suggestions and feedback. Starting this week, we are offering a 3-day training on Dr. Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity framework for all community schools. The training will be offered to teams from each school that are comprised of administration, parents, teachers and CBO staff.

The State-mandated receivership hearings have played a critical part in our larger goal of involving families in their children's education. The DOE held public meetings at all 62 Struggling and Persistently Struggling schools to discuss receivership and its requirements, and the Renewal Schools Program. We were pleased to hear directly from parents, students, and community members about what their schools need to improve to be successful. We recognize that families are key partners in achieving academic excellence for their children, and family engagement will continue to be a key element in these efforts. That said, we are holding ourselves and schools accountable for rapid improvement, all options remain on the table including the merger and consolidation of schools, and school closure.

To further increase educational opportunities for all City students, Mayor de Blasio recently announced new reforms to achieve equity and excellence for New York City school children. This bold plan includes Advanced Placement classes for All, College Access for All, Universal 2nd grade literacy, and a Single Shepherd counseling program for districts 7 and 23. Additionally, these new initiatives will ensure that our elementary, middle and high schoolers across every neighborhood have access to rigorous academic courses, and we will ensure our educators have the proper training and resources to support our students through these new reforms.

These reforms are not possible without Mayoral control. I have seen the extraordinary difference Mayoral control can make in our ability to move our school system forward. Mayoral control builds accountability and stability into the City's education system, which is important for bringing about the deep, long-range reforms that are needed, especially in our struggling schools. With Mayoral control, Mayor de Blasio and I can realize our joint goals of helping our neediest students, turning our struggling schools around, and ensuring that high-quality education programs are available to all of our City's students. We have a plan to fix long-struggling schools, and we will hold ourselves and these schools accountable for results. Your support is important to the success of these schools and we welcome the opportunity to work with the legislature to implement additional strategies to improve the City's struggling schools. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you on this important issue. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.