

January 13, 2021

Chancellor Richard Carranza
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Vacant positions in the Office of Students in Temporary Housing

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

As organizations working with children and families experiencing homelessness in New York City, we write to ask you to fill the more than 20 vacant positions dedicated to students who are homeless. Remote learning has been disastrous for many of the more than 110,000 students who are homeless, and the City needs to marshal every resource to assist these students. It cannot have positions dedicated to these students sitting empty while students are missing months of school.

Currently, nine positions in the DOE's Office of Students in Temporary Housing—including six STH Regional Manager positions—as well as a dozen Family Assistant, Community Coordinator, and Bridging the Gap social worker positions, are vacant. We recognize that decisions about which open positions to fill are difficult ones, given the DOE's current budget constraints and the hiring freeze, and we urge you to prioritize the student populations that have been disproportionately harmed by the pandemic's impact on our public schools. As you know, most family shelters do not have Wi-Fi and some lack adequate cellular reception for students to be able to use their DOE iPads, while students who are doubled-up may be trying to log on to class from the middle of a noisy and overcrowded room. Our organizations continue to hear from families of students who are not engaging in school, whose iPads do not work properly, who do not have a quiet space where they can participate in remote instruction, or who are floundering in the absence of full-time in-person instruction. We are particularly concerned about students in shelter, whose engagement rate in the spring was 13 percentage points below the Citywide rate and 10 percentage points lower than any other student subgroup.

We are grateful that, over the past several years, the DOE has tripled the number of front-line staff—Family Assistants, Community Coordinators, and Bridging the Gap social workers—dedicated to supporting students experiencing homelessness. However, in order for these staff to be effective in their roles, they need supervision, guidance, and training from STH Regional Managers. We were pleased that the City committed to increasing the number of Regional Managers to 18, but six of these positions remain unfilled at a time when they are sorely needed.

In 2003, there were fewer than 9,000 students in temporary housing and 28 STH Regional Managers. Today, there are more than ten times as many students experiencing homelessness, but only 12 Regional Managers, who are tasked with supporting 300 front-line staff members. In addition, tens of thousands of students in temporary housing attend a school that does not have a Community Coordinator or a Bridging the Gap social worker; these students and their schools rely on direct support from the Regional Managers. Given the tremendous need, it is more

critical than ever that the DOE fully staff the team at the Office of Students in Temporary Housing.

We understand the DOE's budget constraints, but also know that the pandemic has exacerbated inequities and increased the need for educational support for students in temporary housing. With the City facing staggering unemployment, the number of students who are homeless will likely balloon even further in the coming year, only increasing the need for support from staff who are already stretched thin. The DOE has taken a number of important steps in recent years to increase support for students who are homeless, and we do not want to see this work undone as a result of the pandemic.

We strongly urge you to move forward with hiring for the more than 20 open positions dedicated to supporting the 110,000 New York City students experiencing homelessness.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

Barrier Free Living

Breaking Ground

BronxWorks

CAMBA

Center for Urban Community Services

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund-New York

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for the Homeless

Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Educators For Excellence - New York

El Puente

Emergency Shelter Network

Gateway Housing

Goddard Riverside

Good Shepherd Services

Henry Street Settlement

Homeless Services United

Institute for Family Health

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc.

Providence House

RiseBoro Community Partnership

Settlement Housing Fund

Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation

The Legal Aid Society

The Opportunity Network

The Partnership for the Homeless

Volunteers of America – Greater New York

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