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January 12, 2012

Dr. John B. King, Jr., Commissioner  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Commissioner King,

As a condition of receiving School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding for the federal Transformation and Restart models, the New York State Education Department (SED) made clear that the City and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) must agree by January 1, 2012 to implement a comprehensive and meaningful teacher evaluation system in New York City's 33 Transformation and Restart schools.

We had hoped that after months of intense negotiations we could reach an agreement with the UFT on a teacher evaluation system that would give principals the ability to dramatically improve teacher quality in their schools. However, as you know, despite discussions over the past five months, we did not reach a final agreement with the UFT by the deadline. Nearly every step of the way, the UFT insisted on conditions that I believe would undercut real accountability.

For example, the UFT wants an outside arbitrator to hear appeals of teachers who receive a rating of ineffective or developing. This would be a major departure from our current appeals process, and stems from the UFT's dissatisfaction with the low-rate at which teachers' "Unsatisfactory" ratings are currently overturned during appeals. However, if one considers the fact that less than 2% of all teachers are u-rated in a given year, it is unsurprising that the overwhelming majority of those would be upheld upon appeal. Ultimately, the UFT was insisting on conditions that contradict the intent of the law and the State's guidance by adding a burdensome new procedural layer designed to keep ineffective teachers in the classroom.

In your letter sent on January 3, 2012, you indicated that because we had not reached an agreement with the UFT, SED was suspending our School Improvement Grant funding for the 33 Transformation and Restart schools. Though we regret the suspension of \$58 million in critical funding for some of the City's highest-need schools, we understand your rationale. We cannot, however, accept the consequences. The challenges in these schools are too great, and the need to overcome those challenges is too urgent, to not take immediate action.

Given their current circumstances, and in response to your letter, we have assessed the specific needs of each of our Transformation and Restart schools and developed a proposed plan that would allow us to maximize the improvement work underway in these schools.

In summary, we are proposing to:

- Convert 13 Transformation schools to Turnaround; and
- Convert 14 Restart schools to Turnaround while allowing them to maintain their relationships with their EPOs.



Furthermore, we are informing you that we will be using existing funding from non-SIG sources for the remainder of the year to support reforms in place at six schools that are currently in Transformation. Two of these schools have already been proposed for phase out. Two of these schools have deep reforms underway and thus we do not want to implement a different strategy in these schools at this time. And for performance-based reasons, we will not be pursuing Turnaround in two schools currently implementing the Transformation model.

As a requirement of the Turnaround model, the Department is committing in these schools to measure and screen existing staff using rigorous, school-based competencies, and to re-hire a significant portion of them using this criteria. We believe that this requirement is achievable within the DOE's current collective bargaining agreement with the UFT.

In addition, consistent with Turnaround requirements, these schools will implement instructional and structural reforms which will include a new mission and vision for student success and faculty excellence; a new curriculum and instructional model; academic supports for serving high-needs students; professional development plans for staff; and structural reforms to create productive learning environments for students.

The DOE's goal is to ensure that we have the best teachers in our classrooms, since an effective teacher is the key school-based lever of student success. When we originally put these schools into Transformation and Restart, we did so with the belief that we would reach an agreement with the UFT on a teacher evaluation system.

But without an agreement with the UFT, we are obligated to advocate for an alternative approach to ensure that every school is getting the job done for students. We believe that Turnaround provides an aggressive framework to raise the bar for students in our PLA schools.

Finally, because we believe in Turnaround as a powerful lever for change, we are informing you of our intent to apply for Turnaround at six additional PLA schools that are not undergoing a SIG model in the current school year. Therefore, we will be applying to implement Turnaround in a total of 33 schools.

My staff will be following up with your office to further discuss New York City's plan. We will also be sending you an addendum to this letter that provides a snapshot of the improvement work underway at these schools and our rationale for why we believe you should approve our plan. In addition, we are prepared to submit a full proposal consistent with SED requirements and guidance.

I look forward to speaking with you further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dennis M. Walcott'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Dennis M. Walcott  
Chancellor