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Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

Children's Defense Fund
A strong, effective, independent voice for all the children of America

Dr. Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
US Office of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

February 5, 2013

Dear Secretary Duncan:

We are grateful for the Obama administration's deep commitment to ensuring that all children have access to the education they need to thrive as productive members of our democratic society, and in that vein, to reducing the stark achievement gap that particularly plagues children of color. It is the civil rights effort of our time. We are also mindful of the enormous challenges inherent in that effort and the need to develop meaningful assessments that support the goals of learning and college readiness for all children.

That is why we wish to draw your attention to the remarkable success of the New York State Performance Standards Consortium—a network of 28 schools, with 26 in New York City, that serves a demographic even more vulnerable to educational failure and the achievement gap than the NYC school system as a whole; yet, it has achieved far greater measurable success across numerous critical indicators than both the city and state. We write to ask that you recognize the success of the Consortium and communicate that support to New York State Education Commissioner John King and Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch.

For more than a decade, the Consortium has graduated its students under a variance from four of the five New York State Regents exams, which students are required to pass in order to graduate. The Consortium uses a system of practitioner-designed, externally-reviewed performance assessments in lieu of four of the five Regents exams. The curriculum used in its member schools focuses on inquiry-based teaching and learning; it engages students in extensive

reading and writing, oral presentations and exhibitions, and problem-solving in higher mathematics—all reflective of the standards found in the Common Core State Standards. (See the Consortium's web site for more information: www.performanceassessment.org.)

Below are some noteworthy results (statistics below are based on data gathered from the NYSED, NYCDOE, and National Clearinghouse data for the 2008 graduation cohort. Full report, with source details, enclosed):

High School Outcomes

- Black students are more likely to graduate from a Consortium school than from a non-Consortium school with a graduation rate of 60.8% versus 53.9% for NYC.
- Latino students, also, are far more likely to graduate from a Consortium school with a rate of 64.9% versus 51.8% for the city.
- The graduation rate for English Language Learners is 30 percentage points higher than the city's rate.
- The graduation rate for Consortium special education students is double the city's rate.
- The drop-out rate from Consortium high schools is half that of other NYC high schools, and the suspension rate is a low 5%, compared with 11% for all NYC public high schools and 12% for its charter schools.

College Outcomes

In a society where youth of color are often marginalized and subject to lower expectations, Consortium students have beaten the odds:

- 93% of Consortium graduates attending 4-year colleges persist into their 2nd year, versus the national rate of 75% and the NYS rate of 81%.
- 84% of those in 2-year colleges persist into their 2nd year, versus the national rate of 54% and the NYS rate 59%.
- 86% of the Consortium's African-American graduating seniors and 90% of Latino graduating seniors were accepted into colleges, versus national rates of 37% and 42% respectively.

School Community

As research indicates, school environment is an important factor in student success and is directly related to the stability and collaboration of the professional community within the school. This has certainly been true for the Consortium schools, which have only a 15% teacher turnover rate versus a New York City rate of 58% (and a 26% rate for charter high schools and 5-12 schools).

Students of color have been systematically shut out of many opportunities for educational excellence in New York City, but their achievement in Consortium schools constitutes a critical departure from this dismal record.

At present, a group of about 20 schools has applied to join the Consortium and has been participating in professional development activities in the hope of obtaining full membership. Many of the applicant schools serve populations comprised entirely of English Language Learners; all serve largely African-American and Latino populations.

The Consortium has requested permission from the State Board of Regents and the State Department of Education to both continue its work and to expand its membership to include those schools that have completed a transition protocol. But the Consortium's future and its proven model of success are now in jeopardy. Immediate action is required, since the variance that the Consortium has been working under is due to begin expiration in the fall.

The Consortium has proven itself to be one of the few viable options that has successfully and consistently provided a pathway to college and career readiness for students of color. We believe its work must be protected and recognized as one of multiple pathways to graduation in the State of New York.

We ask your help to allow the Consortium to continue its work. It is our belief that this would be an important step in the continuing effort to expand educational opportunity as a civil right for all.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Ann Cook, the director of the Consortium, at 917-821-8592.

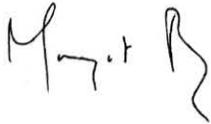
Yours sincerely,



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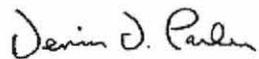
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*For identification purposes only.

Enclosure: Data Report

cc: Deb DeLisle
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