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SENATOR JOHN C. LIU

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HIGHER EDUCATION
FINANCE
BUDGET AND REVENUE
TRANSPORTATION
RULES

September 23, 2022

Chancellor David Banks
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Banks:

The Department of Education would be wise to scrap its unpopular and ineffective lottery-based high school admissions process and return to an admissions system that allows high schools to consider academic performance so as not to penalize the students who have pursued excellence under previous long-standing admissions criteria.

Countless families are deeply upset with the results of the high school admissions lottery administered by your administration. Predictably, the random process placed students in schools that are not aligned to their interests and abilities, often very far from their homes. Many families chose to leave NYC public schools in the face of this unpredictable admissions process. In a large, complex school system such as ours that serves students with an enormous range of abilities and needs, continuing the lottery would be a disservice to all students.

In March 2022, in the face of anger and outrage from families, you expressed the need to change the high school admissions, even going so far as to extend the application deadline so you could consider fixing this broken process. Ultimately, you kept the lottery, noting that it was a system you inherited and that you were up against a "tight timeline." Six months later, DOE has had ample time to formulate real changes to improve this system for all and allow for students to pursue admissions to high school using clearly established criteria.

The effort to randomize high school admissions outraged many families, driving many out of the system, into private or parochial schools, or moving out of the city entirely. Many AAPI families in particular have voiced concerns that the city's lottery system further marginalized our too often overlooked community in which one in four adults live in poverty. DOE statistics show Asian students fared the worst in the city with only 70 percent securing one of their top five high school picks.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no reason to continue the admissions lottery, especially given the resounding failure of last cycle's random admissions process. Overwhelmingly, families demand that the NYC DOE retire lottery admissions as a relic of the pandemic and reinstate an admissions system that values diligence and achievement. Equity and excellence do not have to be mutually exclusive. There must be a concerted effort to achieve both of these worthy goals in a manner that is fair, transparent and engaging to NYC school's robust student and parent population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John C. Liu".