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September 17, 2020

Honorable Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

We all want schools to reopen but, despite your efforts, it is now apparent that schools across the city will not be ready by Monday, September 21. We call upon you to defer in-person schooling and focus all effort on having remote learning up and running and functioning well for all students.

Concerns about in-person schooling have mounted, not abated, as the scheduled reopening on Monday approaches. Widespread concerns of equipment and supply inadequacies, staffing shortages including teachers and nurses, and ambiguous testing protocols – to name just some of the issues – have led to vocal misgivings and some outright protest by teachers, principals, and other school staff, the very people who would be entrusted with our schoolkids during the days. Even more telling is the rapidly increasing percentage of parents who are opting for remote-only instruction for their children.

On the other hand, numerous problems with remote learning persist even as it began yesterday for all students. Widespread confusion about scheduling, software and other on-line tools, staffing assignments, and parental assistance has created chaotic situations that will take time to resolve. Clear illustration of this is the Department of Education's sudden announcement yesterday that students opting for blended in-person and remote-learning instruction will not actually receive all of their remote-learning in real-time, contrary to previous assurances by the DOE to parents who might otherwise have opted for remote-only instruction.

It's universally accepted that in-person schooling can never and should never be replaced by remote learning. This is the case for all students but especially true and critically needed for students on individualized education programs. Unfortunately, the city is simply not ready to provide that in-person schooling in a way that the benefits outweigh the risks.

We believe it best at this point to cut the losses and focus on making remote learning truly effective for all students, including those on IEPs. Doing so will put the Fall 2020 term on track as quickly as possible. Once there is a solid plan for reopening, we can begin to gradually and carefully ramp up in-person learning, taking into account the most vulnerable students in our schools first and foremost.

Thank you and your team for the efforts during the extraordinarily difficult time.

Sincerely,

John C. Liu, NYS Senate NYC Education Committee Chair

Shelley Mayer, NYS Senate Education Committee Chair

Velmanette Montgomery

Robert Jackson

Andrew Lanza

Julia Salazar

Zellnor Myrie

Toby Ann Stavisky

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