March 14, 2013

New York State Senate
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Temporary President and Majority Coalition Leader Dean Skelos, Temporary President and IDC Coalition Leader Jeffrey Klein, and Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins,

The Governor has proposed $20 million in funding for extended learning time (ELT), and we write to ask for your support for this proposal, which was not included in the Senate one-house budget bill. We also ask that you support revisions to the ELT proposal to add community partners and make enrichment an explicit component of this additional time.

We thank you for supporting $15 million in funding for community schools. Community schools provide crucial mental health, health and other support services for students that increase their ability to learn—they also typically include substantial afterschool programming. In partnership with Winning Beginning NY, we ask that you also consider supporting the Governor’s proposal for $25 million for full-day Pre-K.

The proposed ELT programs would be a tremendous opportunity for New York’s students to increase the chances that they will graduate from high school college and career ready. This funding will create an opportunity to begin scaling up some of the successful models already operating in a number of schools across New York and to generate results that will justify increasing these programs over time.

New York has a deep history of strong school-community partnerships, fostered in part through State funding streams like Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention and Advantage After School and the State’s administration of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. A number of schools in New York City, Rochester, and elsewhere in the state have gone even further toward school-community integration into a full extended learning day or year.

We see these funding streams for ELT and Community Schools as a tremendous opportunity to support strong model programs in high-need schools. New York State has a chance to get expanded learning and community schools right from the start. The best way to do so is to develop programs that bring schools and communities together around academics and enrichment.

Add Community Partners

Community partners are an essential component to successful ELT programs. Community partners bring additional fiscal and human resources to struggling schools, enriching school faculty and combating the narrowing of the curriculum with the skills of talented teaching artists, science and business leaders, coaches and college students who model success, enable low staff-to-student ratios, and meet the needs of each child. Community partners contribute to the sustainability of school reinvention by creating space for families to have a voice from the start. Community partners will allow ELT programs to begin smoothly in September of 2013. Experienced program staff relieves the burden on principals of trying to plan and oversee unfamiliar programs while ensuring best practices and accountability.

The Assembly has proposed adding community partners as an option for school districts, and we recommend that the Senate adopt the Assembly’s language and go a step further by making strong partnerships with an experienced community partner a measure of the quality of ELT proposals.
Enrichment

The Governor’s proposal describes extended learning time as primarily a way to allow for “additional time spent on core academics.” While we agree strongly that students need additional learning time and supports in the core academic subject areas, we also think it is important that additional time is used well – that it enriches but doesn’t duplicate the school day. Collaboration between schools and community partners allows students to engage in learning that offers hands-on projects and problem solving through physical education, STEM, arts, civics, music and other engaging subjects. We recommend that the Senate add language evaluating proposals on the use of time for enrichment as well as for core academics.

Research has demonstrated that student engagement is a crucial factor in high school graduation and achievement. Afterschool programs have several decades of research showing that they increase student engagement, in part because of the enrichment activities they offer. We recommend leveraging what is known about best practices to ensure that these programs offer not just MORE time but also BETTER time.

We strongly support the value of the proposed ELT program for New York’s students, and urge the Senate to support the inclusion of $20 million for the ELT program in the final State budget.

Sincerely,

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