



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10007

March 21, 2024

Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr.
Chancellor
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dr. Betty A. Rosa
Commissioner Of Education and President of
the University of the State of New York
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Chancellor Young and Commissioner Rosa:

Thank you very much for taking time to speak with me, Chancellor Banks, and our teams last week and thank you for your leadership and long and distinguished records of advocacy for children in New York City (NYC) and across the state.

I am following up on our meeting to reiterate my deep concerns with how New York State Education Department (NYSED) is carrying out its mandate under Section 8 of Chapter 364 of the Laws of 2022 of the NYS Education Law.

This year, the Governor and State Legislature will make decisions that will have a profound impact on the children and families of NYC for many years to come. They will determine whether to maintain the current system under which the Mayor is accountable for our public schools, or alter the system of public-school governance. As I have said publicly and reiterated to you in our meeting, our system of Mayoral Accountability has led to unprecedented improvements in student learning and family engagement under Chancellor Banks and our Administration and has led to significant progress compared to the prior governance system under past administrations as well. My Administration has implemented initiatives for dyslexia screenings, reading, healthy eating, and mental health for all NYC public school students, while also welcoming tens of thousands of new migrant students into the system.

Further, thanks to Mayoral Accountability, we have improved reading and math test scores over the last two years, outpacing the state, while closing racial disparities. Previous high school graduation rates stagnated at 50 percent — they are now over 80 percent. Again, all of this is possible because of Mayoral Accountability.

Additionally, we launched New York City Reads, a nation-leading curriculum that teaches our kids the fundamentals of reading. This is more than a curriculum change — it is a reading revolution. New York City Reads is already being implemented in more than 90 percent of our early childhood system and across nearly half of our K-5 classes. And recently, Governor Hochul announced that she is following our model and bringing the science of reading to every school district statewide. Without Mayoral Accountability, our plan would have encountered months, if not years, of delay, which our families cannot afford. Additionally, Mayoral Accountability allowed us to launch a first-in-the-nation systemwide dyslexia screening program to make sure no child falls through the cracks, launch gifted and talented programs in every neighborhood, and hire full-time mental health professionals for every school. If we don't extend Mayoral Accountability, we risk going backwards with test scores and declining graduation rates again.

Your role under the Education Law is an important one: You are charged with conducting “a comprehensive review and assessment of the overall effectiveness of the city of New York's school governance system.” The law specifies that the review “shall include a study of school governance models and best practices utilized by other school districts.” I understand that legislative leaders are eagerly awaiting your report and indicate that they will place significant weight on its analysis. For that reason, I was dismayed to hear from you that instead of including a study of school governance models as the law dictates, you intend to examine only districts that use Mayoral Accountability systems. The operative question is not how effective Mayoral Accountability has been in isolation, or when compared to perfection, but, rather, how it compares to other governance systems that policymakers might substitute for the current system. These alternatives have been tested in our city and other districts, and their performance should be analyzed. I therefore call on you to ensure your report analyzes the effectiveness of Mayoral Accountability in NYC *compared to other systems*, including, among others:

- The system of shared (and fractured) governance that existed prior to Mayoral Accountability in NYC, with a Board of Education and Community School Boards;
- A system of elected school board members, one used by many districts in New York and around the country; and
- A system where the superintendent is elected.

Additionally, the report should include an analysis of the innovative programs Chancellor Banks and this Administration have implemented over the past two years. It should identify the data sources used to develop this analysis and the conclusions reached in the report. This includes specifying which education professionals, advocates, scholars, parent groups, and others were solicited to provide testimony and input. The report should also detail the outreach efforts for each of the five public hearings held in New York City.

Such a comparative analysis will be far more useful and telling than your plan to examine districts, all of which have Mayoral Accountability. A comparison will reflect that our current system has produced markedly better outcomes for students and families than what came before, with high school graduation rates rising from ~50 percent to over 80 percent and student proficiency rates rising from far below the rest of the state to meeting or exceeding the rest of the state, though we serve a far higher percentage of students in poverty in NYC.

In any event, as such an analysis is required under the law, I call upon you to change your plans to ensure legal compliance even if these changes require a further delay in issuing the report.

A final point: The law provides that you will contract with an institute of higher education to assist with your report. I am concerned that you chose to contract with CUNY Law School to conduct the review and write the report. As you may be aware, there was a public protest that occurred last year at CUNY Law when I spoke at Commencement. At the very least, this creates a perception of a lack of objectivity regarding Mayoral Accountability when there should be no questions regarding bias on the part of the higher education institution conducting the review.

Again, I thank you for your time and leadership. I request a response to this letter as soon as possible, and certainly before any final decisions are made regarding the content of your report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric Adams
Mayor

cc: Governor Kathy Hochul
Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Majority Leader, New York State Senate
Honorable Carl Heastie, Speaker, New York State Assembly
Honorable Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Honorable Michael Benedetto, Chair, New York State Assembly Education Committee