

February 27, 2015

Dear parents and our school community:

Our public schools are under attack. We ask that you join with us in a citywide event on Thursday, March 12, either before or after school, and ask fellow parents, students, teachers and other school staff, to form a ring around your building to symbolically protect your school. This event is being co-sponsored by Class Size Matters, the UFT, NYS Allies for Public Education and Alliance for Quality Education.

Why are we doing this?

After cutting school funding sharply in recent years, Governor Cuomo has threatened to hold any increase in state aid hostage to an arsenal of damaging education proposals, which could severely threaten the quality and local autonomy of NYC public schools. Though he still owes NYC schools over \$2 billion from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision, and over \$5 billion statewide, he now says he won't increase funding unless the Legislature approves tuition tax credits to private schools, similar to vouchers, raising the cap on charter schools by 100 and eliminating any regional restrictions, which could mean up to 250 more charter schools targeted to NYC, each one guaranteed free facilities at the city expense. These proposals would divert essential funds and space from our public schools. At the same time, he has also said that struggling schools be put in receivership, taken over by the state and/or turned over to private hands.

In addition, the Governor is insisting on a statewide teacher evaluation system that takes nearly all authority out of district and principal hands, basing 50% of a teacher's ratings on student test scores on the highly fallible state exams, with only 15% based on the principal's assessment, and the other 35% on independent evaluators, pre-selected by the state but paid for by the district. Teachers who received one ineffective rating in five years— based solely on the unreliable value-added test scores —could not be granted tenure, no matter what the principal or the Superintendent wanted, and any teacher rated ineffective two years in a row could lose their jobs.

These proposals represent an unprecedented attempt to centralize power over our public schools, and one that could severely damage them. The Governor's attempt to double down on high stakes testing is not only the opposite to what is happening elsewhere in the country, as many states are moving away from test-based teacher evaluation systems, realizing how unreliable they are and unrelated to real learning, but it also contradicts his recent campaign ads when he acknowledged that "Common Core scores" should not be used "for at least five years" and even then, "only if our children are ready."

Many charter schools are hiring buses, closing for the day, and sending all their staff, students and parents to Albany to lobby for more funding and to raise the charter cap. It would be illegal for public schools to do this, and in any case, we would never recommend subtracting important time from student learning. Instead, we ask you to join with us in the event described on the enclosed flyer, and reach out to your school communities to protect your school.

A flyer is attached.

Yours sincerely,