



February 4, 2016

New York State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and New York Board of Regents  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Ave.  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Commissioner and Board of Regents:

We are writing today to urge the Board of Regents to maintain its two decade long rule of electing its Chancellor and Vice Chancellor at the March Regents meeting.

High Achievement New York is a coalition of 28 teacher, civic, parent and business groups throughout the State, united to advance and protect higher learning standards and aligned assessments.

With the retirement of Chancellor Tisch and Vice Chancellor Bottar from the Board, a special interest group is demanding the system be gamed in the internal process to choose their replacements, by moving the vote to the following month when each will no longer be on the board. In addition, this group is calling for specific members of the Board to be named Chancellor and Vice Chancellor.

This is inappropriate for a number of reasons:

- 1) The Board's rules, adopted by vote in 1995, clearly state that "election for the offices of Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the Board of Regents shall be conducted during the regular meeting of the Board in March..." Any change to when the vote takes place, therefore, would need to be preceded by a Board vote to change the rules themselves. Those long standing rules shouldn't be changed in the middle of a process.
- 2) The Board should be able to choose its own leadership without outside interference, a point that State Teachers Union President Magee made when she stated "we believe the internal discussions and elections [of the Board's leadership]...that's their business. We stay out of that business".
- 3) Since the Board of Regents was established by statute in 1784, it has provided oversight over education in New York at arm's length from the day to day political process. Some, including members of the outside group calling for this rules change, have argued that the Board has been too reactive to the political process recently. Changing its rules to suit one group would move the Board closer to day to day politics, not further away.
- 4) The current Chancellor and Vice Chancellor should have a role in choosing their replacements. Organizations where outgoing leaders are leaving voluntarily have those leaders participate in the process of vetting their successors. In addition, the Board should take advantage of the current Chancellor and Vice Chancellor's combined 40 years on the Board, rather than on new members who will be sitting in their first meeting.
- 5) The Board rules and practices shouldn't change simply because an outside interest group wants to suit its political purposes.

In a time of such significant transition it is imperative the Board of Regents remain consistent with its long standing rules and practices. An 11th hour change to the long held date for choosing Board leadership could undermine the public's confidence in those practices.

We look forward to working with whomever the Board chooses, so that all children in New York State have equal access to a high quality, rigorous education.

Sincerely,

Amanda Barney  
English Teacher  
Mattituck Jr. Sr. High School

Kevin Rothman  
House Principal  
Excelsior Academy

Heather C. Briccetti  
President and CEO  
Business Council of New York State Inc.

Nancy Ruscio  
Superintendent  
Homer Central School District

Neal Gorka  
English Teacher  
Democracy Prep

Jonathan Schatz  
Felix V. Festa Middle School Campus  
Principal, D-School

Kim Hardwick  
Principal  
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Jenny Sedlis  
Executive Director  
Students First NY

Jill Kafka  
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Donna Seymour  
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Stephen Sigmund  
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Bethlehem Central Parents for Excellence

Evan Stone  
Co-Founder and Co-CEO  
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Jenn O'Connor  
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Council for a Strong America

Jason Zwara  
Executive Director  
Buffalo Reform Ed

Samuel L. Radford III  
President Buffalo School District Parent  
Coordinating Council (DPCC); Governor's  
Common Core Task Force, Member

Arva Rice  
President and CEO  
New York Urban League

Sheri Rodman  
Program Manager  
America Achieves NY Educator Voice  
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