

Dear Chancellor Fariña and Mayor de Blasio,

We, the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE), are a collective of current and former public school educators who have been committed to fighting for social justice in our school systems and our society over the last twelve years. We applaud your interest in including educators in the continual effort to improve our city's public schools, particularly along the lines of what Chancellor Fariña has termed the "5 C's and an E: Communication, Collaboration, Content, Capacity Building, Celebration and Efficiency." Below we will comment on what these concepts mean to us as educators deeply committed to the wellbeing of our students and the communities we serve.



First of all, we'd like to emphasize the most important "C" of all, the seemingly forgotten purpose of our public school system: Civic Engagement. We believe that education is integral to democratic society, and that our school system must equip our students with the capacity and desire to participate in and improve our society. Current reforms that emphasize our "competitiveness in the global economy" or "21st century skills" neglect the crucial role that education plays in a democracy. While we of course must ensure that students can support themselves and their communities through productive employment and career pursuits, this is not a sufficient goal. As our mayor has stated, socioeconomic inequalities continue to plague our city, and we must empower our students through education to work towards a better New York City for all.

We must teach them how to **communicate** and **collaborate** with their fellow community members in order to share observations and ideas for positive change. We must teach them the rich **content** of our city and democracy through a well-rounded, interdisciplinary curriculum that speaks to their experiences and uses those experiences as a starting place from which to build. We must build their **capacity** to serve as active agents of individual and community transformation and to see themselves this way by **celebrating** their achievements and experiences. Lastly, we must teach them to be critical thinkers who are able to make the tough, strategic choices necessary to build **efficient** and more importantly, **equitable** systems for the betterment of society.

Ironically, current corporatist reform efforts—high-stakes testing, school closures, charter schools—have been quite **inefficient** at actually improving student learning (or "outcomes") because of their insistence upon prioritizing profit and scalability over students' needs. However, we ultimately reject "efficiency" as a priority of our public school system. Instead, our schools must prioritize **equity**: every student has a right to a high quality school system that empowers their communities and is firmly committed to anti-racism and opposing prejudice and oppression in all forms. A democratically run and educationally empowering school system may not look "efficient" in the short term, but it is a crucial long term investment in the health and well-being of our city.

In the interest of beginning this process of communication, collaboration, capacity building, and equity, here are some concrete steps we can take to build a school system based on empowering community members and improving our city:

Communication

- Seek out and empower all stakeholders' desires and visions for their school system.
 - Bring back a geographical (district) school support structure.
 - Replace the PEP with a decision-making body comprised of democratically elected members.
 - Establish a framework for school and teacher evaluation that emphasizes peer teacher and peer school reviews, as well as continuous mentorship.
 - Broaden the role of the Parent Coordinator to that of a Family Advocate who works with families, not for administration.

Collaboration

- Allot time for teachers to do crucial planning and support work outside of the classroom.
 - Diminish teaching loads and increase "prep" time so that teachers can collaborate to develop and deliver rigorous, relevant, and responsive curricula as well as communicate with parents.
- Decrease class sizes.
 - Decrease class sizes so that class activities can center on student collaboration (instead of competition) and teachers can give more focused, individualized feedback to students.

Content

- Deliver a well-rounded curriculum that emboldens students' diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities.
 - Mandate that all schools provide high quality arts, physical education, science, social studies, foreign languages and social-emotional learning, as well as math and English instruction for all students.
 - Expand the availability of student-centered, project-based learning such as those practiced in the New York Performance Standards Consortium.

Capacity

- Invest in a sustainable, community-based, expert teaching staff that feels respected and intends on teaching as a career.
 - Increase resources for teacher training programs and professional development.
 - Enact a moratorium on Teach for America recruits and review the long-term impact of other alternative certification programs, such as New York City Teaching Fellows.
 - Expand the number of educators of Color through targeted recruitment and training.

Celebration

- Celebrate the diversity of backgrounds and life experiences of our students and champion the exemplary efforts put forth by students, teachers and administrators throughout the DoE to learn, to teach and to overcome adversity.
 - Highlight and celebrate teachers who are consistently expanding their expertise through ongoing professional development and collaboration with colleagues.
 - Support the implementation of multicultural, culturally, and socio-economically relevant curricula that go beyond monthly cultural celebrations or “tolerance” to engage deeply and critically with NYC’s many vibrant cultures.

Efficiency & Equity

- End high stakes testing.
 - Tailor instruction to students’ needs and evaluate instruction through meaningful assessments that do not systematically disadvantage certain groups of students over others, such as students of Color, students from lower-income backgrounds, students who are English Language Learners, or students who are not fluent in certain cultural customs and traditions.
- End all school closures and charter co-locations.
 - Support struggling schools to improve without tearing apart established school communities, particularly in underserved neighborhoods that most need stable institutions.
- End the school to prison pipeline.
 - Relax the policing of schools, particularly those with large percentages of students of Color, and replace policing with restorative justice that educates and empowers students’ decision-making and civic-mindedness.
 - Mandate that all teacher and school staff training addresses anti-racism and racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices.

When and only when our public school system is replete with these “5 C’s and an E”, at the classroom, school and systemic levels, will our students truly internalize the quintessential task of democracy: working together to develop and further our common vision of a just city and a just society.

We invite you to join us at a future NYCoRE meeting to engage in dialogue further.

-The New York Collective of Radical Educators