



November 24, 2010

BY FASCIMILIE

Dear Commissioner Steiner,

I write on behalf of the ARISE Coalition, comprised of parents, educators, and advocacy organizations concerned with the progress and outcomes for students with disabilities in New York City's public schools. The Coalition came together two years ago to improve special education; promote greater transparency and accountability; and most critically, assure more positive outcomes and options for all students, with and without disabilities. Our agenda for change is enclosed. ARISE takes this opportunity to reach out to you as you near your final decision on the requested waiver for Cathie Black to become New York City's next Chancellor.

Students with disabilities have been marginalized for far too long and the results have been disastrous – with only 13% of students with disabilities in New York City proficient in English Language Arts and only 26% graduating with a Regents or a Local diploma. Fortunately, the NYC DOE has finally turned its attention to the problem. Last year Chancellor Klein created a cabinet level position dedicated to students with disabilities and English Language Learners. Last February that office announced plans intended to improve and increase support for students with disabilities in their community schools. While we view the creation of a cabinet level position and the plans to work to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities as positive developments, the jury is still out on how successful the reforms will actually be. New York City will need strong leadership and sustained commitment if the City's special education system is ever going to change for the better.

We believe that the next Chancellor for the NYC DOE, a system that includes over 210,000 students with disabilities, must have the following qualifications:

- * The capacity and commitment to engage with, receive input from, and communicate respectfully with the full education community including parents, students, advocates, educators, experts, and academics.
- * An understanding of the diversity of New York City's student body and commitment to education reform that includes the most educationally vulnerable.
- * The ability to use education-related data while understanding its strengths and limitations, and a commitment to sharing data about successes and failures of initiatives and reforms with the public.

We trust that in weighing the needs of the State's students in New York City, you will consider carefully the anticipated effects of the new Chancellor's strengths and weaknesses on all students, including students with disabilities. If you would like to discuss this matter further, I may be reached at (212) 822-9523.

Thank you for your consideration.

Maggie Moroff
Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition