

THE NEW YORK EQUITY COALITION



November 13, 2020

Dear Commissioner Rosa, Vice Chancellor Brown, and Members of the Board of Regents,

During this difficult time for families across New York State, we are grateful for all the ways that the Board of Regents and New York State Education Department (NYSED) are supporting students and educators. Most notably, we believe the school reopening framework that the Regents and NYSED put in place this summer took important steps to prioritize educational equity alongside paramount health and safety issues.

With the school year well underway, the civil rights, education, parent, and business organizations of The New York Equity Coalition are concerned that educational inequities – stark even before the pandemic – are worsening, and that opportunity gaps are getting wider. We write now to ask the Board of Regents and NYSED to adopt specific additional measures to urgently support students and to ensure that your vision of a more equitable education system is achieved at this critical moment.

Initial data indicate that students from low-income backgrounds and students of color are much more likely than wealthier students and white students to be learning fully online this fall.¹ The disproportionate reliance on remote learning for students who were underserved even before the pandemic raises significant educational equity questions. Unfortunately, and despite hard work by educators across the state, recent polling reveals that parents have low overall satisfaction with remote learning and that there is a wide gap between the learning resources families say would be helpful and what their schools are providing.²

These challenges are not new. Rather, parent surveys conducted since school buildings first closed in March and the experience of many of our organizations working directly with students and families have consistently raised concerns about the **availability of teachers and amount of live remote instruction, access to personal learning devices and high-speed internet, and the need for more information for parents about how their children are doing academically and whether they are receiving the academic supports they need.**

These themes reinforce the importance of urgent oversight from state education officials to ensure that students are not being left out, especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness.³ Building on the strong framework for school reopening that state education leaders issued this summer, we ask that the Board of Regents and NYSED adopt two specific policies that could improve educational equity during the pandemic:

1. **Provide clear, concrete expectations from the state for the instruction, services, and supports** students should receive and how parents should be engaged and supported during fully remote and blended/hybrid learning – along with a mechanism to determine whether these expectations are being met. We recommend that enhanced oversight include explicit attention to the academic and social-emotional needs of the students and communities who were underserved before the pandemic and who experienced disproportionate unfinished instruction as a result of school closures, including

addressing how time and staff are being deployed this fall to meet these students' needs remotely. In addition, we recommend that the state establish meaningful and consistent definitions of student attendance, participation, and engagement.

2. **Require meaningful and timely data from all school districts** to shine a light on widening opportunity gaps so policymakers, educators, families, and other stakeholders can swiftly address them. We recommend that the Board of Regents and NYSED require the public release of data on student instruction, engagement, and support services at least monthly from each school district, broken out for the district as a whole and by race/ethnicity, economic status, English learner status, disability status, and housing status, on data including:
 - What is the average daily attendance rate and chronic absenteeism rate for students learning remotely, in blended/hybrid models, and fully in-person?
 - What percentage of students enrolled in blended/hybrid models and in remote learning have never signed on/logged in, and what percentage of students do so infrequently or inconsistently?
 - How much live remote instruction are students receiving daily in each subject, at the elementary, middle, and high school levels?
 - How much extended learning time is being provided remotely to students who did not successfully engage in remote learning during school closures in the spring?
 - What percentage of students enrolled in remote or blended/hybrid learning have access to a laptop, tablet, or other technology device that they do not have to share?
 - What percentage of students enrolled in remote or blended/hybrid learning have high-speed internet access?
 - What amount of screening, identification, outreach, and services are being provided to English learners and in special education to students with disabilities who are learning remotely?
 - How many school meals are being distributed, including meals provided on-site, delivered, and picked up?

We understand the immense pressure that districts and schools are under during this unprecedented pandemic, and we offer this request in the spirit of balancing the vital needs of often underserved students with the capacity challenges facing the education system. Thank you for your consideration, and please let us know if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

The New York Equity Coalition

¹ The Education Trust–New York. “Remote Learning Takes Center Stage” (October 2020). Available at: https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Equity-Data-Snapshot_Remote-Learning.pdf.

² Statewide survey of public school parents conducted by Global Strategy Group on behalf of The Education Trust–New York from October 16-21. Available at: https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NY-Public-School-Parents-Memo_October.pdf.

³ The New York Equity Coalition has released other policy briefs providing additional recommendations to address these challenges, including: “5 Equity Questions for School Reopening Parent Meetings” (August 2020), available at: <https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/5-Questions-for-Reopening.pdf>; and “Reopening Stronger: Remote Learning and Educational Equity” (August 2020), available at: <https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Remote-Learning-Educational-Equity-Policy-Recommendations.pdf>.