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The Teaching Profession- At a Critical Crossroad

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We sit at a crossroads and we now must make a choice. Do we value public education and education professionals, or do we believe that access to a free and appropriate public education for all children should be disregarded for other alternatives?

The Monroe County Education Coalition believes that a high quality public education is a right and not a privilege in this country and serves as an important foundation for a successful Democracy. In order to maintain a robust public education system, we must have trained and dedicated teachers to provide the tools and supports that all kids need to succeed.

Debate is ongoing as to whether or not a teacher shortage exists in both in New York State and our country. We know for sure that there are particular curriculum areas that are always difficult to fill, such as English as a new language, special education, science, math, and foreign language. It is also difficult to find teachers for urban and rural settings.

How viable is the field of education as a profession at every level? The facts indicate that we are not only experiencing a shortage of current teachers but a critical decline in students going into the field of teaching. The U. S. Department of Education estimated that 1.6 million teachers would be needed by 2022. In New York State, 10,000 – 18,000 new teachers are estimated to be needed annually. According to the 2016 NYS Retirement System (TRS), there are over 50,000 active members over the age of 55 and 35,000 active members between the ages of 50-54. That means within the next 5 years, 1/3 of active TRS members would be eligible to retire.

Meanwhile colleges have suffered declining enrollment in their teacher preparation programs; drop offs of over

40% have occurred locally and across the state since 2009. A number of issues have contributed to the decline. The Great Recession resulted in a sharp reduction in state revenue that led to massive layoffs and a dismal job market for graduates during that time. This legacy continues even as funding has increased. Education reforms have perpetuated a false narrative that all public school were failing and linked teacher evaluations with high stakes testing. Increased certification requirements and costs for exams have adversely affected prospective teaching candidates.

International statistics show that public education in the United States is on par with the best in the world. However, a recent article in the Kappan Magazine (Aug. 2018) reported, for the first time ever, 54% of parents polled reported that they do not want their child to become a teacher. Poor pay, working conditions and student behavior were cited as reasons for this stance. Could it also be because the public no longer perceives teaching as the noble profession it once was?

We need qualified and passionate individuals to replace and fill our teaching ranks. We need teachers of all cultural backgrounds, ethnicities and experiences as role models for our children to demonstrate what it means to be an American who can successfully function in a diverse society and be an engaged global citizen.

We are at a crossroads and we need to choose. The Monroe County Education Coalition chooses to promote and elevate the teaching profession in order to improve the quality of life for our children, our communities, and our nation and sustain our Democracy. We ask that you join us in this important pursuit.