



# DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NYS

**In response to Governor Cuomo's statements about underperforming schools, the MCSBA membership submits the following:**

- **No government leader can freely criticize school performance as if it is someone else's problem** – Each agency of government has a role in the overall welfare of our communities and as a society we **ALL** have a collective interest in the success of every student as a learner and a productive citizen.
- **Children are shaped by their lives outside of school** – Children spend less than 15% of their time in school. The environmental factors that influence children outside of school cannot be ignored. These can include families in crisis, violent neighborhoods, lead poisoning, food insecurity, drugs and other substance abuse. Chronic absenteeism and poor school performance can be linked to each of these factors.
- **The high correlation between poor school performance, poverty and family stress is well documented** – The dropout rate for low-income high school students (the lower 20% of family incomes, which represents an annual income of \$21,000 or less) is twice as high as the dropout rate for middle-income students and four times higher than for high income students. *The City of Rochester has the sad distinction of having one of the highest child poverty rates in the nation.*
- **The Governor has direct responsibility for the wellbeing of New York's children**– Although the Board of Regents, which is appointed by the Legislature, oversees public education, ALL other agencies concerned with children fall under the leadership of the Governor. Some of these agencies include:
  - Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)
  - Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)
  - Department of Health (DOH)
  - Office of Mental Health (OMH)
  - Department of Correction
  - State University of New York*These agencies have been decimated by cuts and closures and by regionalizing offices. The trickle down effect of this has greatly diminished the ability of our local communities to provide critical supports to children and their families.*
- **Boards of Education members are elected local officials who are directly accountable to their constituents for the public schools in their communities** – The academic performance of children who live in poverty does not invalidate the right of citizens to elect their own representatives. *The Governor's proposal to remove locally elected boards violates the foundation of our democratic principles.*
- **Although the Governor continually criticizes the high cost of public education in NYS, he has largely ignored education leaders' pleas for mandate relief** – Education leaders have provided evidence and testimony on what reliefs schools need to be more cost effective. This has fallen on deaf ears. *In fact, the current education reform that was legislated after his promise for mandate relief has been extraordinarily costly to implement and has created many new mandates.*

**If the state is serious about improving student results, it must acknowledge and then act on its moral and constitutional obligations to help its neediest citizens arrive at school ready to learn.**

## Supporting Data

**Research repeatedly proves that environmental factors influence child development, including the ability to learn.** Research also identifies successful programs that can mitigate the negative effects of poverty, and which could be brought to scale to help needy children.\* *This is a state issue because New York communities like Rochester and Buffalo have some of the highest poverty rates in the nation.*

**Poverty's impact varies across a continuum of needs so there are no one-size-fits-all solutions.**

In 2013 a family of four qualified for Reduced Price Lunch with an income of \$43,567 while a child whose family lived on a single minimum wage salary would only have a family income of \$15,080. A child living in the latter situation would need to cope with challenges and deprivations significantly different from a child living in the former situation.

**The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has committed to advocating for addressing the health effects of poverty because:**

*"...Poverty can inhibit children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty is a contributing factor to toxic stress, which has been shown to disrupt the developing brain of infants and children and influence behavioral, educational, economic and health outcomes for years."*

**The AAP goals include:**

- Expanding access to affordable health care services.
- Expanding access to basic needs such as food, housing and transportation.
- Promoting positive early brain and child development and school readiness and success.
- Supporting parents.

**Governor Cuomo's own New NYS Education Reform Commission Report, "Putting Students First Action Plan," recognizes this relationship:**

*"Research shows that a child's most formative years are during early childhood, at the very beginning stages of their formal education, and even prior. The education and guidance children receive during these years have a profound effect on their academic success at every subsequent stage. Unpreparedness in kindergarten permeates through the education pipeline, as these students are often the same ones who cannot read or do math at grade level, who drop out of high school, or who need remediation in college, if they even pursue a college degree."*

**The report's recommendations included:**

- Increase access to early educational opportunities by providing high quality full day pre-kindergarten for students in highest needs school districts.
- Restructure schools by integrating social, health and other services through community schools to improve student performance.

**Only when our elected leaders begin to confront the facts around poverty and legislate meaningful support for child development will we truly be able to break the terrible cycle of poverty and school failure.** Left unaddressed, poverty not only diminishes the potential of the children but also results in huge future losses to our economy.

\*For information on successful programs that can help mitigate the impact of poverty check out The Children's Agenda at <http://www.thechildrensagenda.org/ourwork.php> and/or [How Children Succeed](#) by Paul Tough