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Jhone Ebert  
Senior Deputy Commissioner for Education Policy  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Avenue  
P-12 Office of Education  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Ms. Ebert,

The New York State Education Department has developed a blueprint for improved results for students with disabilities. Within the Blueprint, NYSED identifies seven research and evidence-based core principles that place focus, responsibility and accountability on all constituents involved in a student's educational career. Specifically identified are: communities, boards of education, district and school leaders, all teachers, students and parents. There is an expectation that students will become more engaged in advocating for themselves and participating in developing their educational goals and plans, while parents and family members play a meaningful role in the process. There is a focus on teachers providing specially designed instruction to meet the specific needs of students, and that all teachers are involved in the planning, preparation and implementation of appropriate research based instruction. There is an expectation that data is collected and utilized to provide levels of support appropriate for students and that programs and services provided are based on the students' specific needs. Recognizing the importance of preparing our students for life after public school

education, there is an expectation that while in school, students receive appropriate instruction and experiences in work-based learning. All of the above should be provided within an inclusive educational setting appropriate for the students.

The New York Council of Administrators of Special Education (NYCASE) applauds the New York State Education Department for taking a strong stand in moving our educational system forward in order to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for our students. Research has shown that when students with disabilities are included in general education classes with appropriate supports, the results include: increased academic achievement, increased social experiences and outcomes, increased collaboration among parents and teachers and increased inclusion within the community. During the 2013-2014 school year, only 58.4% of students with IEPs in New York State were included in general education classes for 80% or more of the day. Research has shown that the more time spent in general education, the higher students' scores are on standardized tests of reading and math; the fewer absences students have from school; fewer referrals for disruptive behavior; and the better the outcomes for post high school experiences in the areas of employment and independent living. This was found for all students with disabilities, regardless of their disability label, the severity of their disability, their gender or their family's socio-economic status (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levin, & Garza, 2006); (Waldren & McKleskey, 1998); (Cosier, 2013).

While we are in full support of increasing inclusive educational opportunities for all students, we understand that for a small percentage of students with disabilities, an inclusive educational setting will not meet their highly individualized needs. We must ensure that all students have access to an appropriate educational experience; one that holds high expectations and fully prepares the student for life after public education. In addition, we hope that the New York State Education Department commits to ensuring that Impartial Hearing Officers and the State Review Officers hold the same commitment as public educators to the provision of special education services in the least restrictive environment, and recognize that only for a small

population of students with specific and significant disabilities, students' educational experiences and opportunities must be provided within high quality inclusive programs and activities within the public school system. We encourage higher education institutions to better prepare all teachers to accommodate students of varying, and at times, significantly different learning styles and needs, in their classrooms. This will require increased emphasis in teacher preparation programs on Universal Design for Learning and collaborative teaching practices. The principles of the Blueprint clearly articulate the vision and direction of the New York State Education Department. We applaud the efforts of the Department for its intent and declaration of focus, and encourage the development and adoption of legislation that will push these principles to regulation.

Sincerely,

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