

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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This idea is equality. Equality is central to our identity as Americans. It's made our country a place where people of every race and color and religion and background could maximize their talents and contribute.

It's America at its best, and all of us – in one way or another – have benefitted from America's commitment to equality. For some of us – if not all of us – doors have opened, opportunity has presented itself, and we have seized the day.

But for all its power as an idea, equality remains elusive for far too many people of color in New York and across the country. None of us can fully escape the seeping sense of unfairness that conflicts with the fundamental values of our society.

In the decision in *Brown*, the Supreme Court made clear that – for all of the injustices in the world – some of which may be beyond our power to correct -- there was one institution that was different – one placet

I know school can be the difference between hope and despair because it was for me – and I have dedicated my life to trying to create more

children of color are further behind, and the promise of equality through education still eludes us.

We always hoped that somehow society's stubborn injustices would be denied entry to our classrooms. The classroom was supposed to be sacred – a protected haven where children would be given the tools to succeed in equal measure.

We all put our faith in our schools to help solve society's toughest problems – from poverty and joblessness to crime and social breakdown. And with each decade, the effort to bring about equality through the classroom takes new form. With each decade, we become bolder, more creative and more determined.

The nation required states and districts to prove with a common assessment that all kids are meeting standards and to publish data by race, income and other factors – so we know how the performance of children of poverty compares with that of children of wealth.

We created charter schools – some of which are defying the odds and outperforming some of our wealthiest schools in the state.

In 2010, here in New York, we committed to require schools to meet high standards that prepare all children for college, work, and life – and we passed laws to hold ourselves responsible and to know which schools and teachers are succeeding or struggling – and to do something about it when the outcomes fall short.

Administrators, unions, school boards, and elected officials all signed agreements in support of these higher standards for teaching and learning.

And today there is even more we can do -- concrete steps we can take in New York -- to better realize the promise of *Brown*.

With the support of the Board of Regents and the legislature, we can create regional and magnet high schools with strong instructional programs that attract a more diverse student body from across district lines.

With the support of the Board of Regents and the legislature, New York can focus on providing greater supports to our English Language Learners, invest in bilingual education, and pass the New York State Dream Act so that undocumented students can go to college.

In the tradition of Assemblyman Arthur Eve, we can raise college completion rates by building in more supports for low-income students through investments in the opportunity programs at SUNY, CUNY, and in the independent sector.

We can restructure school funding formulas to promote greater equity,

The evaluation law is not a “gotcha” system – it is a vehicle for fostering continuous improvement. And New York has invested more than \$500 million in professional development to help everyone improve.

Teachers, administrators, and districts have been given time to get this right and they will continue to have more time and more support in the years ahead.

As we continue to move forward and improve, let’s also remember why we set high standards and why we have assessments and accountability. We do it for one reason: our children and the reality that education is their best shot at success in the 21st century. This is especially true for our low-income children of color – who have only one slim little chance of making it in this world. That slim little chance is education.

They don’t have inherited wealth. They don’t have connections. They have education. That’s it. Nothing else.

And if we don’t hold ourselves accountable – and if we don’t demand transparency around student growth – and if we don’t challenge ourselves to give our kids the very best education possible – children of color and low-income children will be the first to lose.

The adults won’t lose. The people who defend the status quo won’t lose. Only the children will lose.

They’ll go through 10 or 12 years of schooling barely learning to read, struggling with math, and some will cover up their low self-image by acting out, by bullying, by abusing substances, or just withdrawing completely.

Eventually, they just drop out – and plunge off the cliff into dead-end jobs, prison or an early grave. Tens of thousands of New York’s children make that deadly decision every year – and disproportionately those children look like Linda Brown.

I respect those voices who urge thoughtful adjustments. I look for constructive insights from my critics. I listen patiently even when the attacks become personal.

But too many of the voices attacking the Common Core have done so with false narratives about the motives and intentions of education reform.

We are one people, one society, and one nation and when we raise our voices together in pursuit of our common values we can produce a sound that is greater than all of those voices of fear, defeat and retreat. These are all our children. This is our responsibility. And we will not be silent.

Thank you.