



# Moving Toward a More Equitable School System

Lessons Learned from My Listening Tour

Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

Dear New Yorkers,

I cannot thank you enough for your warm welcome, which included 45 town halls with students, parents, and staff. To date, I have visited 62 schools and have met with 2,125 students, 1,876 parents, 2,984 teachers and employees, and 336 elected officials and community partners (and this list keeps growing).



What I have heard and observed reinforces my belief that New York City has an incredible wealth of talented and hardworking educators, and that together we can continue to improve the education of each child. Our schools are making progress, our communities are vibrant, and our educators are more committed to our children and families than I have seen in my nearly three decades working in schools across the country. The most respected leaders in the world continue to seek jobs at the DOE, and stay to make an impact.

This report covers the major themes I heard during my listening tour. The topics I am going to share came up frequently, have given me a better understanding of how the New York City public school system works, and have informed my thinking for the future.

When Mayor Bill de Blasio asked me to become Schools Chancellor, he was clear that we must double down on the promise of equity and excellence. I share the Mayor's commitment to equity and excellence and, I too, feel the fierce urgency.

As we build on the strengths of initiatives like Pre-K for All, 3-K for All, Universal Literacy, and College Access for All, I am committed to serving every one of our students. Students with special needs, in temporary housing, learning English, and experiencing trauma—all deserve a high-quality education. Students, no matter their background or ability level, deserve excellence.

We have a great deal to be proud of: the highest graduation rates and lowest dropout rates in history, record high scores in ELA and math, record lows in school crime, alongside historic investments in mental health, restorative justice, anti-bias training, and social-emotional learning.

We know that our best is yet to come and that we cannot rest until every child, in every school, in every neighborhood, and in every borough receives the education they deserve—an education that unleashes their innate brilliance and unlocks their creativity.

Together, we will build on the progress of the last four years and take our school system to the next level.

In unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard A. Carranza".

Richard A. Carranza  
Chancellor



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## By the Numbers:



**2 months**



**5 boroughs**



**62 school visits**



**132 elected officials**



**45 town halls and listening sessions**



2,125 students



1,876 parents



2,984 employees



**204 advocates and community partners**



# Listening Tour





# Strengths



**A**s I met with students, parents, and educators, I heard a great deal of positive feedback about the work taking place in our schools, and I was proud to listen to the people we serve acknowledge the tremendous progress we have made. In every community, in every borough I visited, New Yorkers talked about our Equity and Excellence for All agenda and the work to put every child on the path to college and careers.

I saw firsthand how we are building a strong foundation early with 3-K, Pre-K, Universal Literacy, and Algebra for All, and how we are expanding access to rigorous and college-aligned courses with Advanced Placement for All and Computer Science for All, and we are also providing more support to our students along the way, through College Access for All, Single Shepherd, and the Community and Renewal Schools program. What follows is a snapshot of what I found that resonated in my many conversations:



## Career and Technical Education (CTE)

At Aviation High School in Queens, I observed students in senior propeller and sheet metal classes, and childhood memories came flooding back. My father was a journeyman sheet metal worker in Tucson, Arizona, and I loved helping him with projects. I understand what draws students to CTE. The seniors I observed in Queens were earning their airframe or power plant licenses and a New York State Regents Diploma. Most importantly, they were having fun and bonding over their shared experience.

In CTE programs across the City, students get rigorous curricula, internships, job shadowing opportunities, on-the-job training, and industry certifications. This is how we help students succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century job market.

Students, parents, educators, elected officials, and business leaders praised CTE as a great strength of our system. They want us to provide even more students in every borough with access to high-quality CTE programs.

## Arts Instruction

My earliest memories are of my father playing his guitar surrounded by family members, and it was only a matter of time before my twin brother and I learned guitar and started playing mariachi. Music kept me focused on a goal, whether it was mastering a certain passage in a song or expanding the repertoire of songs I memorized

and performed. Music also kept me out of trouble and grounded me. It remains the foundation of who I am.

The arts touch many of our students in different and powerful ways. During my school visits, I saw children of all ages engaged in phenomenal arts instruction. Musical performances that stood out for me include the marching band that greeted me outside J.H.S. 259 William McKinley in Bay Ridge. I also saw amazing visual arts throughout the City: the creativity and skill on display in classrooms and studios in every neighborhood is simply incredible.

At the town halls, parents made it clear that they want us to expand access to the arts to reach every child across every grade level and, I too, share this vision.







## College Access for All

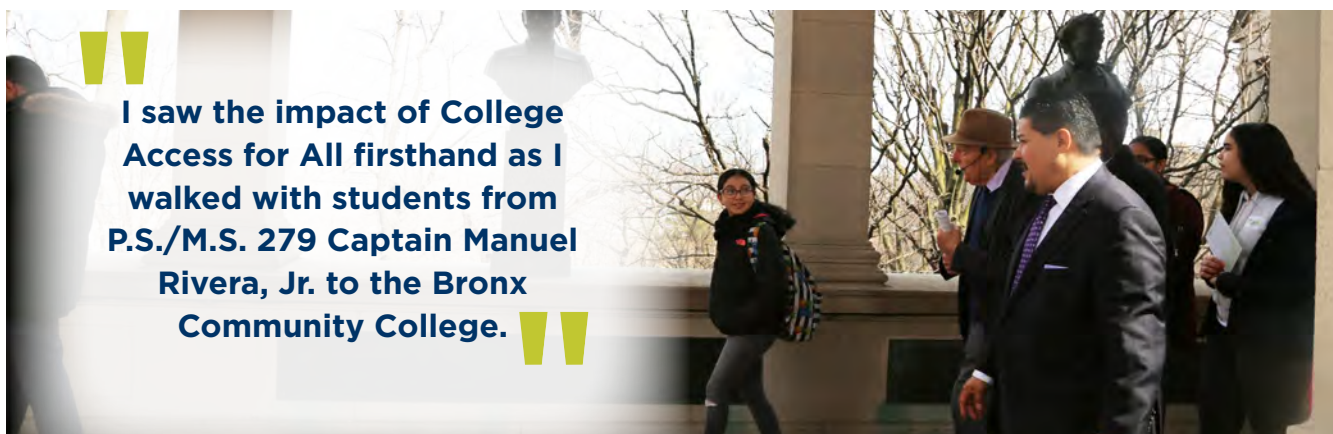
My parents never attended college, but they understood that a college degree would be my passport to the world. Like many parents today, however, they had no idea how to apply for financial aid, enroll in a university, or choose a course of study. Our College Access for All initiative ensures that every middle school student will visit a college campus and every high school student will graduate high school with an individual college and career plan.

I saw the impact of College Access for All firsthand as I walked with students from P.S./M.S. 279 Captain Manuel Rivera, Jr. to the Bronx Community College. Seeing these young scholars set foot on a college campus—many of them for the first time—was powerful. Experiences like visiting a college campus as a young scholar can be life changing, and we must

continue to show all our students that college is possible and attainable.

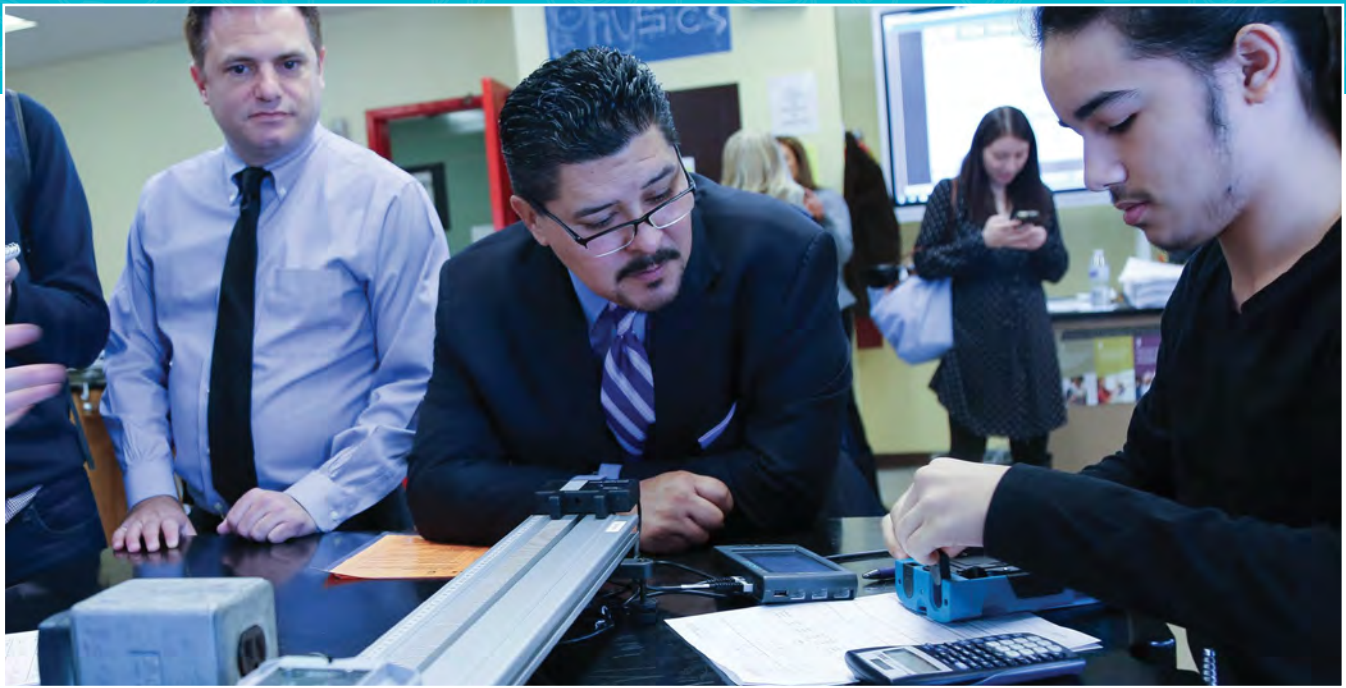
## Instructional Coaching

The three R's—Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic—are the building blocks of a rigorous education. When I look at NYC public schools, I see a laser focus on improving instruction in all these areas. Our teachers want to grow and sharpen their skills. Everyone I spoke to said that the support they receive from instructional coaches, like the literacy coaches provided through our Universal Literacy initiative, field support structure, and Renewal Schools program, is the linchpin in students' ability to read, write, and understand math. Superintendents, principals and teachers said this support is critical, and requested even more resources to help improve ELA and math instruction across the City.



**I saw the impact of College Access for All firsthand as I walked with students from P.S./M.S. 279 Captain Manuel Rivera, Jr. to the Bronx Community College.**





## Computer Science for All

Being tech-savvy is a necessity for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Our students and educators are clamoring for skills that will enable them to succeed in the global economy. My first event with NYC educators was at a Computer Science for All training on April 3, where I spoke to more than 1,000 teachers and principals. These educators volunteered to participate in this advanced training during spring break, and their commitment is reflected in our Computer Science for All classrooms throughout the City.

I had the opportunity to see some of the fruits of their collective labor at M.S. 216 George J. Ryan in Fresh Meadows, Queens, where students demonstrated the robots they had built and programmed, and showed me how they were training their robots to detect lines and navigate autonomously. When I see our young students master algorithmic problem solving and other advanced computer science principles, I know that our City's future is bright, indeed.

## Charter Partnerships

All students in New York City's public schools deserve access to a high-quality education. Our charter schools are a critical part of this work

by giving families access to options that best suit their needs. Kids benefit when district and charter schools work together to share best practices. I enjoyed visiting a charter school that is building an entire school that specializes in supporting students who have experienced trauma—and just as important—willing to share innovation with their district schools.

At the Bronx School for Excellence, I saw students and teachers engaged in joyful learning: singing, playing music, writing, and doing math. For me, the politicization of education is a red herring—we must make sure that each child in our City has an excellent education. When we focus on collaboration, we can better serve all students.



## Counselors, Social Workers, and Mental Health Supports

We know that when children have a caring, stable adult in their life, they are more likely to graduate on time. That is why we are providing kids in Districts 7 and 23 middle and high schools with a Single Shepherd to guide them on the path to high school graduation. Support from these counselors and social workers also reduces the effects of trauma, stressors, and a scarcity of resources that many of our students and their families may face.

In order to achieve a socially just school system, we must continue to address our students' ever-growing challenges. Our educators, leaders, and elected officials are asking for more school counselors, social workers, and mental health supports. I am committed to expanding these resources.

## Pre-K and 3-K for All

Without exception, New Yorkers are proud of our City's commitment to early childhood education. Nothing is more important for equity and excellence than establishing a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning. For the first time in our history, every four-year-old has access to free, full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten. Pre-K for All is a game changer and has made a dramatic difference in the lives of tens of thousands of young children, setting them up for success during their school years, while providing economic and social benefits to families. What I heard from families: "I want 3-K in my district!" We are continuing to expand 3-K for All throughout the City.

## Passionate Educators

Our teachers are the key to everything that we do. The New York City teaching force of nearly 79,000 is doing powerful work each day. It brought me great joy to hear students and families rave about the impact teachers had made on their lives.

Over the last several weeks, I have observed



hundreds of our educators in action—in classrooms, music rooms, gymnasiums, libraries, and on field trips. These teachers exemplify the best of public education. They believe with all their hearts that the students they serve want to learn and excel, and believe it is their responsibility to unlock their students' brilliance. Our educators are highly skilled at what they do and share with one another to build their collective professional practice.

Of course, we know that teachers cannot do it alone. It takes a village, and paraprofessionals, secretaries, school safety agents, support staff, nurses, counselors, social workers, parent coordinators, partner organizations, deans, and school leaders, play a critical key role in ensuring the success of our schools.



# Challenges

**T**here is no question that New York City public schools face serious challenges. At every stop on my tour, people brought up inequities—in school funding, educator resources, and access to schools—and asked how we are going to level the playing field for our historically underserved students and across our schools. The list of concerns encompassed everything from segregation, culturally relevant instruction, and social justice, to social-emotional supports, access to technology, staffing shortages, and improvements in the way we educate students with special needs. Below are more details on some of the most pressing issues facing our students and schools.



## Desegregating Our Schools

Our diversity is what makes us strong and is why New York City is a thriving economic superpower, a vibrant place to live and work, and a beacon of hope for the nation. Yet, for all of our strengths, our schools remain some of the most segregated in the nation. Students have been the most vocal on this issue throughout my time in the City, asking me directly, “what will you do to address segregation in our schools?” They also have no shortage of ideas

about how we might continue our work to integrate our schools, and weave together the fabric of our City, resulting in an even stronger future for the generations to come.

As I told our students, families, staff and community partners, I am fully committed to investing in and expanding programs to desegregate our schools, and will work with communities to tackle this challenge head on in order to create a more fair, equitable, and just system.



## Serving Students in Temporary Housing

Last year, more than 105,000 students were identified as living in temporary housing at some point during the school year. Students in temporary housing face unique challenges that result in lower attendance rates which ultimately affects their ability to perform well academically. This is a challenge that we are working to address across City agencies, but we know there is more work ahead. From investing over \$10 million in mentoring programs and shelter-based reading teachers, as well as our Community Schools program and our partnerships with community-based organizations. With this investment, we will ensure that students in temporary housing receive the support they need to achieve their dreams.

## Advancing Equity and Inclusion

Students at every one of my town halls asked tough questions about how we plan to tackle disparities in our classrooms, and throughout our schools. Race-based disparity is evident to students on a daily basis. We also see it in student discipline rates, access to Gifted & Talented programs, and throughout much of our system. Mayor de Blasio and the City Council have made an important commitment of \$23 million to expand our anti-bias training, allowing us to reach thousands of teachers and school staff in the next few years. We must find ways to build on this beginning and extend our reach to every staff member in every school.

Just as our work to serve English language learners must acknowledge and embrace students' home language and culture. So, too, must all our instruction be attuned to the students we serve. Throughout our system, I will continue to ask tough questions, and work with our staff and community partners to ensure we address disparities, deconstruct inequitable systems, and build a more equitable future for every child.



## Funding Inequities

Thanks to our City Council and Mayor de Blasio's leadership, the minimum funding for schools through the Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula is now at a 90 percent baseline for all schools, up from 81 percent at the beginning of this Administration. This increase will provide schools with greater resources to hire more teachers and counselors, invest in professional development and targeted student interventions, bring new technologies into the classroom, and better meet the needs of the communities they serve. While the increase in the FSF floor is an important step in putting all our schools on a path to equity and excellence, we still have funding inequities to address.

During my listening tour, students, parents, and educators asked the DOE to do more to address funding inequities across the City. We must continue to invest in our schools and make sure that all of our students are learning in schools with excellent teachers and robust resources.

## Underserved Schools

Rather than thinking of these schools as struggling or underperforming, I think of them as schools of opportunity. They represent our opportunity to make a difference for



kids, to reverse the impact of historical underinvestment, and to help communities lift one another up. These schools are our opportunity to change the future.

We are laser focused on the 50 remaining Renewal Schools. We are going to intervene promptly, as a system, and engage more deeply in conversations with these communities. I am excited by the progress Rise schools have made, and we are going to continue to work to maintain and build upon that progress. Rise schools are an example of what happens when we invest in our students, our schools, and our communities: there is nothing our students cannot achieve.

Ultimately we have a chance to change the narrative of public education nationally by continuing to prove that students in urban centers can compete with their peers anywhere in the world. We owe it to future generations to get this right.

## School Climate

We have no greater responsibility than ensuring that our students are in safe and inclusive learning environments. During my listening tour, parents and students alike asked me repeatedly what I will do as Chancellor to keep our schools safe.

To start, I want to be clear that we work with the best police force in this country: the NYPD. Together, the DOE and NYPD develop individualized safety plans for each school, share protocols to immediately address incidents, and staff all of our schools with School Safety Agents that are NYPD employees. These agents are integral parts of our school communities, and are highly trained officers committed to keeping our schools safe.

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At a school level, we also need to continue to shift the culture to cultivate and maintain environments that are open, honest, and built on strong relationships between adults and students. We're making significant investments to improve school climate, including \$47 million in mental health supports and \$8 million in anti-bullying initiatives, trainings and targeted supports in schools, all aimed

at better serving students and families.

We take any incident in our schools seriously, and staff are trained on reporting procedures each year. Every incident must be reported, investigated, and appropriately addressed. Through a progressive discipline model that promotes positive, age-appropriate disciplinary interventions, our schools are better equipped to manage behavioral concerns and address

underlying issues, while still holding students accountable. This work is ongoing, and remains a top priority.

## Supporting Mental Health

The research is clear about the relationship between mental health and students' academic performance as well as their social, emotional, and physical development. Throughout the City, students and parents, alongside educators and community leaders, have asked me how we can expand students' access to critical supports in school, including mental health clinics, counselors, and social workers. While our work in this area came up as a strength, we want to expand upon it. We must deepen our partnership with First Lady Chirlane McCray's ThriveNYC initiative. We must ensure that every child has access to mental health resources that are aligned to our priorities.

## Streamlining the System

Contemplating the size of our public school system is a humbling exercise. Overall, our students outnumber the entire population of the city of San Francisco, where I once worked. We serve over 176,000 students in the Bronx—that is more students than in the entire state of Hawaii, and would be the 13<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the country if it were its own city, putting it just slightly ahead of Dallas Texas. Staten Island, our smallest borough, with a little over 56,000 students, is still bigger than Boston Public Schools.

On my listening tour, people often asked me how our programs and policies connect to the broader

agenda of the school system, and how that connects to equity and excellence.

Parents have expressed frustration about not knowing whom to call with a question or concern. Although the DOE has made tremendous strides in terms of parent engagement, we have a lot more work ahead. Principals have shared that they sometimes receive conflicting messages from multiple offices within the DOE. My takeaway is that we need to communicate more clearly and consistently with educators, parents, and stakeholders. To be truly responsive to all, we must make sure we have systems and structures in place that allow us to be agile-to listen to, and work with the communities we serve, and to hold ourselves accountable.

The work we have accomplished since Mayoral Control was first established has helped to bring the system into better alignment. My predecessor, Chancellor Carmen Fariña, took this work to the next level by establishing Field Support Centers and re-empowering superintendents to serve as instructional leaders. To build on this, we need to align our system to focus all of our attention on how we improve schools. This will be a continued focus for me as we move our system forward.

## Serving Students with Special Needs

At every stop I made, parents asked how we would better serve our students identified as needing special education services. As I observed our special educators in action at our district schools, and in District 75 programs, it was obvious that we





have talented and committed staff members. We have come a long way in serving more of our students in the least restrictive environment, but this an area where we can, and will, do better.

I visited a middle school recently where a classroom full of kids were talking about their research on the First Amendment. They were debating the question, “how would you change the First Amendment?” The students were required to defend their position and stand up in a room full of strangers. As I left the room, what struck me most about the debate, it was impossible for me to identify which students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), because every student in this Inclusive Collaborative Teaching (ICT) class was engaged as a scholar. We must continue working to make our schools places where all students, regardless of ability, are welcome, included, and valued.

## Serving English Language Learners

When I started school at age five, I only spoke Spanish and began as an English Language Learner (ELL). My parents trusted that the public school where I lived would teach me English. Today, I am fully bilingual, an asset I cherish and one that has allowed me to embrace every part of my Mexican-American heritage. New York City is a city of immigrants from all over the world. The latest estimate has some 800 languages spoken on any given day in our city, and nearly 200 different languages spoken by students in our schools.

We owe it to future generations to ensure that all children in our system get to master English while honoring and keeping their native culture and the fullness of their identity. New Yorkers have been clear throughout my listening tour: we need to expand bilingual and dual language programs, and continue to improve the way we serve English learners throughout the City.

As with special education, we do this by aligning our ELL program with the resources available through our teaching and learning, curriculum, and instruction departments. A holistic approach is the way we change lives.



## Technology and Infrastructure

From my very first town hall until my last, parents asked about how we can increase students’ access to technology, and how we can leverage technology to prepare students for an exciting future. Futurists now tell us that most of the careers of the future do not even exist today. As I look around our City, I continue to marvel at how far technology has taken us, and how quickly. What was once science fiction is now the smartphone in your pocket. How do we prepare students for an uncertain and exciting future?

Our Division of Instructional and Information Technology has already taken bold steps to increase access to bandwidth and expand WiFi capabilities at our schools, and much-needed additional work is underway. Simultaneously we must continue to innovate in the classroom. There is a vibrant technology-empowered teaching community in New York City. We must lift up and support these educators on the front lines of helping us prepare students for the future. They know that while the exact careers and tools our students will use may not yet exist, the lessons our students are learning right now are the skills of the future. Working in teams, solving complex problems, embracing ambiguity, creativity-these are just a few of the skills and attributes that the next generation will need to succeed in the global economy.

As I have begun to meet with our partners in industry and business, it is clear that they stand ready and willing to expand on our collaboration to ensure our students have the tools, resources, and experiences necessary to be ready for the future.

# Opportunities

I began this job with an ambitious but critical mission: to bring equity and excellence to the nation's largest school system. As I listened and learned from New Yorkers, I realized that while we don't yet have all of the answers, we are all part of the solution. Lifting up our school system is not the job of one Chancellor, or any one person, but the job of millions, and I am grateful that so many people are ready to roll up their sleeves and do the hard work that will enable all of our students and schools to succeed.

I have said this before, but it bears repeating. Public schools belong to the public. Our doors are open to all students, and we will serve you regardless of immigration, socio-economic or housing status, regardless of what language you speak at home, or any special needs you may have. We will empower you and give you every opportunity to reach your full potential.

We will also empower our educators, administrators, and school staff members with the resources and support they need to succeed at their core mission: to prepare the citizens of tomorrow.

Make no mistake, it will take big ideas and big investments—of capital, manpower, and time—to achieve a world-class education system that delivers on its promise of equity and excellence. I know it is a major undertaking, but I am hopeful because I have learned that:

New Yorkers always dream big, and do big things. You do not shy away from a challenge but instead fight to preserve and protect the people, communities, and things you cherish. I have no doubt you will fight just as ferociously for our public schools.

New Yorkers are visionaries. I am excited to work with our Mayor on a bold, progressive agenda, that embraces diversity and is

committed to making New York the fairest, most enlightened big City in America. I have no doubt you will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in our fight for equity.

New Yorkers know that education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and that it takes excellent teachers to prepare our students to lead this vibrant City, and our nation, into the future. I know you will continue to be staunch advocates for public education.

I have also learned that our school system has many strengths. The DOE has strong leaders at all levels, and committed and capable staff throughout the system. We have supervision and support structures built around the communities we serve, and our policies reflect the needs of these communities.

The last four years gave us a strong foundation. Now, we are laser focused on equity, because you cannot have excellence without it.


We must ensure that every student knows how to write well, think like a scientist, understand history, and learn computer science. The diploma they leave our schools with should also say that they are critical thinkers (and know how to discern news), have a digital identity (because that will follow them for the rest of their lives), are articulate (so that they can express ideas), and that they can work in teams and collaborate.

Education is the great equalizer. It is the great empower-er of the next generation, and right now our students are the future leaders of New York. By working together, I am confident that we can create a school system that reflects the best of this diverse, inspiring, and innovative City—a system in which every child has an equal opportunity to not just thrive, but also succeed beyond their wildest dreams.

I am rolling up my sleeves and digging in—I hope you will join me.

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is the great  
equalizer.**





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