February 12, 2016

Dear NYS Board of Regents & Commissioner of Education Elia:

New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE) is a parent-led grassroots coalition of over 50 parent and educator groups from every corner of our state. On January 15th, NYSAPE called on the NYS Board of Regents to postpone the election of a new Chancellor and Vice Chancellor until after new board members are appointed in April of 2016. Elections for leadership in both the NYS Legislature and over 700 publicly elected local school boards across the state already follow this practice.

High Achievement New York (HANY) is an education reform group that receives funding from the Gates Foundation, Helmsley Trust, and Robin Hood Foundation. They have telephones routed to offices at Mercury LLC, a NYC based lobbying firm. This past week, HANY called the parents of NYSAPE "a special interest group...demanding the system be gamed," as well as declaring that embattled outgoing Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch and Vice Chancellor Anthony Bottar should vote for the next leader of the Regents.

Last spring, over 240,000 parents Opted Out of NYS tests, in essence a public referendum on the current state of public education. Parents said “no” to excessive testing, to the coercion of the Common Core by private interests, to a politically motivated and fundamentally broken teacher evaluation system, and to student data sharing regulations written by the EdTech industry.

Former Education Commissioner John King has labeled parents who advocate for their public school children as "special interests." The response has been calls of "No Confidence" and calls demanding his resignation. Since he resigned, John King has been appointed acting Secretary for Education at the US Department of Education, where he continues to threaten the parent Opt-Out movement with federal funding cuts for schools.

The Gates Foundation has an inappropriate influence on public education, a fact not lost on parents of public school children. Taking advantage of the financial crisis, and using federal funding, the Gates Foundation has foisted an EdTech-driven Common Core agenda upon our public education system. In fact, recent attempts in Massachusetts to remove the repeal of the Common Core from a statewide Massachusetts ballot this fall are the work of the Gates Foundation.

New Yorkers know who the special interests are and who is trying to silence the voice of the people. We overwhelmingly finance public education in our state with billions of tax dollars each year, yet groups like the Gates Foundation have used much smaller amounts to buy a privatized shadow regulation setting group within the New York State Education Department, the "Regents Fellows" program. The Regents Fellows, staffed by former BigTech product
mangers positioned as education experts and controversial Teach For America short-term teachers with little to no training, is an affront to parental trust of the New York State Education Department.

It is quite ironic that High Achievement New York labels parents as "special interests," and "gamers of the system."

Parents see what is happening in their children's classrooms and want Gates Foundation reforms out of New York. Choosing to side with High Achievement New York will make our problems much worse.

The members of NYSAPE urge the members of the Board of Regents to listen to the people.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee Members of New York State Allies for Public Education:
Jamaal Bowman, Bronx, NY
Carol Burris, Queens, NY
Nancy Cauthen, NYC
Chris Cerrone, Western NY
Jeanette Deutermann, Long Island
Kevin Glynn, Long Island
Marla Kilfoyle, Long Island
Jessica McNair, Central NY
Lisa Rudley, Westchester
Bianca Tanis, Hudson Valley
Katie Zahedi, Hudson Valley

Cc:
Governor Andrew Cuomo
Secretary of Education Jere Hochman
Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie
Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan
Senate Minority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Senate Coalition Leader Jeffrey Klein
Assembly Education Chair Catherine Nolan
Assembly Higher Education Chair Debra Glick
Senate Education Chair Carl Marcellino