



July 20, 2020

To Governor Cuomo and Members of the New York State Legislature:

As members of the statewide DemocracyReady NY Coalition, whose mission is to foster civic readiness for all students, we are concerned about the threat to New York students' educational rights posed by the COVID crisis. As our country continues to respond to the COVID-19 public health crisis, and reckons with the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks and George Floyd, schools will need more resources, not less, to meet the needs of every student. Continuing to underfund schools will have a disproportionate impact on the education of students in under-resourced communities and vulnerable students of color.

Under the state constitution, all students are entitled to a sound basic education that prepares them to be effective civic participants. This right does not disappear in times of fiscal constraint—even during this pandemic with its resulting unprecedented health and economic crises. And it is especially important as our nation engages in a national dialogue and reckoning about the state of race and justice in America. This means *every school* must have qualified personnel, up-to-date curricula, appropriate class sizes, instructional materials and technology, facilities, and student supports that meet all its students' needs.

Schools must also be able to provide their students sufficient civic learning opportunities. In the current crisis, civic readiness is more important than ever to strengthen and amplify the political and civic voices of historically marginalized communities and ensure the government works effectively for all, regardless of income or race. In these times, efforts by school systems to work with nonprofits, community members, and local governments to provide students with civic education could be restorative, empowering, and uniting, not to mention an important investment in the health and vitality of an accessible, inclusive and representative democracy.

Underfunding schools will worsen existing educational inequities and inadequacies, which have been exacerbated during COVID-19. Our education system must provide youth with culturally competent curriculum and effective civic education to ensure they gain the knowledge, skills, dispositions necessary for effective civic leadership and participation. School budget cuts disproportionately harm the most vulnerable children in marginalized communities because their schools are more reliant on state aid and are more likely to already be under-resourced.

The pandemic and the current movement for equity and justice has exposed more clearly than ever the terrible extent of social vulnerabilities and inequities New York State has long ignored or thought too complex or politically risky to confront. New York's leaders cannot continue to perpetuate these inequities. In the face of a looming and potentially

DemocracyReady NY is a statewide, nonpartisan, intergenerational coalition of organizations and individuals working together to ensure all New York students are prepared for civic participation.

unprecedented school-funding crisis, *we must tackle these inequities*. We must build back better to ensure that our most vulnerable students are never again disproportionately harmed or deprived of their right to the opportunity for a sound basic education.

The DemocracyReady NY Coalition calls on New York's leaders to commit to preserving education budgets and allocating sufficient funding to meet the instructional and learning support needs of all students, including especially those in the most vulnerable and historically underfunded districts. In particular, the Coalition encourages the state to identify solutions that result in elevating educational opportunities for historically underserved students and maintaining civic learning as an educational priority as it is essential for helping the state achieve these ends.

The members of the Coalition are committed to working with and supporting you to accomplish these recommendations. We remain available individually and collectively to discuss these recommendations in greater detail at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael A. Rebell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael A. Rebell, Coordinator
[The DemocracyReady NY Coalition](#)

cc: Chancellor Betty Rosa and Members of the Regents
Interim Commissioner of Education Shannon Tahoe