

RAISING THE BAR FOR STUDENTS & SCHOOLS: OUR COMMITMENT TO ACTION



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

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Providing all young people with access to an education that prepares them to succeed in college and careers is the greatest social and economic challenge we face as a City and nation. We all know that education enables people to fulfill their potential in multiple ways: to find jobs that pay good wages, to enjoy good health, to provide more stability for their families, and to provide them an overall better quality of life.



Raising the Bar for Students & Schools



The New York City public schools are focused on delivering this promise of educational opportunity. We owe this to all of our 1.1 million students. We want parents, the school community, and the community at large to know what we have done as a system to meet this responsibility, and what we are going to do next to aim even higher.

Since the start of Mayor Bloomberg's Children First initiative in 2002, through the hard work of our teachers, principals, school support staff, parents, students, and communities, we have already made substantial progress toward a system of great schools.

- Hundreds of millions of dollars were redirected to school budgets so that those working closest to students can make decisions about how to improve student outcomes.
- A wave of talented leaders and teachers have worked collaboratively and used innovative approaches to reinvent public education and transform the lives of thousands of children.

- The City has opened 529 new schools since 2002, including both district and public charter schools, all of which are empowered to support student achievement and promote a culture of high expectations.
- Teachers and school leaders are now, more than ever, accountable for student achievement.

The result?

Students and schools are better prepared to succeed.

This is a good start, but we can and will achieve more.

The work in classrooms is a vital foundation that is continuously improving to help more students push

themselves and achieve more. All of us must work together — educators, parents, communities, universities, and the private sector — toward the common goal of developing well-rounded students who are college and career ready. We all have a role to play in our children's success.

Working together towards higher standards, we can expect greater success for our 1.1 million students.

For decades, the New York City high school graduation rate was stagnant at 50 percent. For the class of 2010, however, the four-year graduation rate was 65 percent. That means that, across our City, 10,000 more students are graduating from public

high schools each year. And higher expectations for student achievement have already led to more students earning Regents diplomas and taking Advanced Placement and other college-level courses.

There is much more work to be done, but we have a foundation of success on which to build. Our continuing belief is that we will achieve a system of great schools if we focus our efforts on student and school success.

In this document we will explain our goals and ask for help to succeed. We are committed to *Raising the Bar* for our 1.1 million students and more than 1,700 schools.



Goal: College
& Career
Readiness for
All Students



Together, we need to work hard to ensure that all New York City students graduate high school ready for college and careers. This goal is ambitious. It is also necessary for the future of our students, our economy, and our City.

To successfully prepare all students — including students with disabilities and English language learners — for life after high school, teachers need to create demanding learning experiences in their classrooms every day. These efforts must begin when students enter pre-kindergarten and continue through elementary, middle, and high school. College and career readiness for all students can be achieved only if every individual in our school system focuses on what he or she can do to help students succeed. In every classroom, in every grade, we will work together toward this shared mission.

We know that for our students to thrive in a rapidly changing world, they need to learn to think creatively, solve problems, make effective arguments, and engage in debates. Over the next few years, New York and more than 40 other states will transition to a new set of learning standards designed

to prepare all students, from pre-kindergarten through grade twelve, for success in college and careers. Over time, teachers will integrate these new learning standards, called the **Common Core**, into their classrooms. The Common Core standards provide us with a powerful opportunity to develop students' critical thinking skills and push them to become life-long learners.

We believe that students excel in schools with cultures of high expectations and we will continue to work to create a system of schools that helps students achieve their potential. We will open new schools across the City that are designed for student success — where expectations run high and students are excited to learn and are motivated to succeed in college and careers. We need the help and commitment of parents, families, and communities to achieve these goals.

The **Common Core** standards provide us with a powerful opportunity to develop students' critical thinking skills and push them to become life-long learners.

To learn more about the **Common Core** in New York City schools, ask your child's teacher or visit the Common Core Library at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary>

To view the **National PTA's** parent guides to the Common Core, visit <http://www.pta.org/4446.htm>

To learn more about the **Common Core standards** across New York State, visit <http://engageny.org> and for information nationally, visit <http://corestandards.org>



Strategy To

Reach Our Goal:

Engaging Families



We must set higher expectations for all students to ensure that our children develop the skills they need to reach their fullest potential. Principals and teachers certainly play key roles in strengthening our schools; however, it is clear that our City's public schools also need parents and families as essential partners to prepare our students for a brighter future.

Parents and families are children's first teachers and their most important support system. Their expectations can fuel a child's success. As we challenge ourselves to *Raise the Bar*, we ask parents and families to commit to the effort.

Whether it's checking up on homework, attending a PTA meeting, or getting children to school on time ready to learn, engaged parents and families are critical to student success. Involved parents and families, combined with quality teaching and learning in the classroom, will boost

college and career readiness for our students. There are many ways to join us in these efforts. Turning to our NYC Family Guide is a great start. Visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/NYCFamilyGuide>

Here is a closer look at the commitments we have pledged to students, families, and the City to prepare our children as the next generation of leaders.



High-quality teaching is the most powerful tool for helping students reach these higher standards.



Our Commitment to Action

Commitment 1

Raise Expectations for Teaching & Learning

Although we have made great strides in student achievement, too many students are not asked to do the type of rigorous work that success in college, career, and life demands. Higher standards — which are the essence of the Common Core — are necessary to prepare more students with the skills they need to succeed when they enroll in college or begin a career.

High-quality teaching is the most powerful tool for helping students reach these higher standards. Our work aims to ensure that all students benefit from great teaching. We have already begun professional development to provide all teachers with opportunities to raise their instruction to a higher standard mapped to the Common Core. And we'll tap our strongest

teachers to model best practices and serve as mentors within their schools.

Our work involving higher expectations must be both effective in the short term and sustainable for the long haul. Phasing in the new Common Core standards by the 2014–15 school year, when State tests will be fully aligned to these new standards, exemplifies our commitment to academic excellence now and in the future.

By combining our focus on integrating the new Common Core standards with an increased attention to improving teacher effectiveness, we will spark a cycle of improvement based on feedback, support, and standards of excellence for students and teachers.

What We Will Do

1 Challenge students to take on more rigorous and engaging work

This year, teachers across the City will spend several weeks teaching a unit of curriculum aligned to the new Common Core standards focused on getting students ready for college and careers. Then every student in the City — starting with the youngest grades — will engage in a challenging assignment in literacy, and one in math, testing their ability to master some of these new standards. For example:

- In literacy, instead of just reading stories and writing about their own experiences, students will read and analyze challenging nonfiction texts — such as President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address or a recent analysis of global warming trends — and then write opinions and arguments in response.
- In math, instead of solving straightforward problems with only one right answer, each student will get the chance to solve challenging “real-world” problems from fields like engineering or statistics.

In an effort to make sure all families and communities are aware of the national Common Core standards, we will provide information about the Common Core standards at Community Education Council meetings throughout the City. During the presentations, families will be able

to learn about Citywide and district trends in student performance. They will learn how the Common Core standards will support student progress, about the way State tests will evolve to assess how well students are learning through the Common Core methods, and about the Citywide instructional expectations for 2011–12 that are helping our students get ready now.

2 Hold all students to high standards

In schools across the City, teams of teachers meet regularly to examine student work and data and develop instructional plans that address the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. This year, teacher teams will incorporate “Universal Design for Learning,” a well-respected, research-based methodology that uses flexible strategies to allow entry points into the curriculum for all learners. School leaders will also be trained to effectively schedule their students and teachers flexibly to broaden access to general education classrooms for students with disabilities.

3 Cultivate highly effective teachers through more meaningful evaluation and support

In our most effective schools, principals and other instructional leaders are in classrooms regularly, observing teachers and providing clear feedback

based on well-understood standards of excellence. Through an expanded pilot in 2011–12 and a Citywide rollout to follow, we will build the tools, skills, and accountability for all school leaders to observe teachers, identify growth areas, and provide high-quality support. Teachers who demonstrate leadership potential early in their careers will be identified for further mentoring and development to ensure that a pipeline of excellent instructors are on track to become tomorrow’s principals.

4 Establish college and career readiness benchmarks

To prepare our graduates for what comes after high school, we will develop college and career readiness “benchmarks” that describe the skills and experiences our students need at each grade level to succeed in college and careers, including:

- Student performance measures (such as Regents exam scores and credit accumulation).
- Non-academic skills (like perseverance and independence).
- Action steps (such as submitting financial aid forms and visiting college campuses).

In the early grades, these benchmarks will provide a comprehensive picture of what a child should know and be able to do to be on track for future college and career readiness. Over time, the Department of Education will develop a resource to provide students, families, and schools with

individualized, real-time information about student progress in relation to these benchmarks, and help them plan strategies to improve students’ preparedness for college and careers.

In our most effective schools, principals and other instructional leaders are in classrooms regularly, observing teachers and providing clear feedback based on well-understood standards of excellence.





To ensure all schools can provide what students need to succeed, we are committed to providing them with high-quality support.

Commitment 2

Create New Schools and Support Existing Schools

Our commitment to achievement requires ensuring that all students in the City attend schools designed for student success. Greater achievement for students and excellence in instruction for teachers occurs in schools with cultures of high expectations.

To ensure all schools can provide what students need to succeed, we are committed to providing them with high-quality support. Our school support networks — teams of coaches selected by each principal — help schools reach their instructional goals by providing professional development for principals and teachers, and by sharing best practices across schools. The network structure enables us to provide schools with more individualized support according to their needs and to place greater decision-making authority within each school.

When schools fail to help their students achieve success, even with intensive

supports, we have phased them out and opened new schools that are among the strongest, highest-quality schools in the City. The graduation rates in new high schools outpace those of the ineffective schools they replaced. Additionally, these new schools have attracted diverse talent, including a new pool of school leaders excited by the prospect of positive change.

With each new school created, we ensure there is a right option for every student, and that families can find a place for their children to thrive. Over the past nine years, we have concentrated these efforts in historically underserved communities such as Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and the South Bronx. Our strategy has yielded dramatic gains for students, but too many communities across the City still lack high-quality school choices. Our work must continue to address the needs of these underserved communities until every family in the City has access to an excellent school.

What We Will Do

1 Open 50 new schools per year to give more students and families access to high-quality options

Opening new schools with fresh leadership and energized instructors breathes life into buildings that were uninspiring to students and teachers alike. Both quantitative and qualitative data show that students in New York City's new schools engage more and thrive. New school development efforts will focus equally on public charter and district schools, with a concentration on middle schools — where our students have been struggling the most. We will look to organizations with strong track records and the most successful schools across the City to lead the way for the next generation. We will also continue to intervene in school environments that persistently fail to meet student needs. The Department will diagnose what is working in schools and what needs to be improved. District leadership will consider data and community feedback to determine the best course of action for struggling schools.

2 Ensure adequate space and learning environments

A successful school has a welcoming environment that is conducive to learning. As we create new schools designed to better serve our diverse student body, we must find adequate space for those students. Building space is scarce in many New York City neighborhoods. Given this reality and the growing demands of public school families for high-quality schools, we

must use our existing public school buildings in the most efficient manner possible. The Department must locate schools side-by-side within a building. We match new schools in buildings where there is existing space and use new school construction to increase the total number of seats available. In this way, we are meeting the demands of our expanding school population.

3 Use enrollment policies and program options to provide equitable access to high-quality opportunities

Our new school development efforts will be complemented by enrollment policies that support access to high-quality schools and programs for all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students entering the system at different points during the school year.

4 Offer specialized network experts to support school improvement efforts

Struggling schools often need assistance and structural changes to maximize the resources available to support them. This fall, dedicated professionals on our network teams will use data, including progress reports, to identify the schools that are most in need of support. For the very lowest-performing schools, we may propose a strategy of phasing out the failing school and replacing it with a new school. For other struggling schools that have demonstrated the capacity to turn around, networks will provide additional intensive support to schools.



Parents and families are the essential partners our schools need to achieve the goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers.



Commitment 3

Inform & Involve Families as Essential Partners

Families play a powerful role in putting children on the path to enroll and succeed in college and the workforce. Parents and families are the essential partners our schools need to achieve the goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers. Helping students take the next step along that path must be the daily work not just of principals and teachers, but of students themselves and of those who care for them. We will work to establish and strengthen these partnerships by actively engaging with families in pursuit of our common goals.

Informed and involved parents and families lead to better results for students and more successful schools. To help facilitate this partnership, we have created family guides for students from pre-kindergarten through grade twelve to share important details about students' learning experiences. For every age, parents and guardians will

find detailed information about what a student at that stage is expected to learn and what kinds of questions to ask about his or her progress. From what activities to do at home as a family to encourage learning, to asking for support from the schools, these guides are printed in 10 languages and offer specific, practical suggestions that inform and involve families as essential partners. Visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/NYCFamilyGuide>

True partnership means improving the way that we listen to and work with parents and families. A key part of our strategy is to prioritize the role of families and community partners, ensuring that our Department's Division of Family and Community Engagement becomes a national model for proactive outreach and for supporting and sustaining family, school, and community partnerships.

What We Will Do

1 Improve effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences

The Department will develop resources to help parents and families gain more value from fall and spring parent-teacher conferences, including:

- Guidance for families about key questions and topics they might discuss with their child's teachers during the conferences.
- Activities that parents can do at home to help their children meet some of the new standards.

Similarly, principals and teachers will benefit from:

- Examples of effective parent-teacher conferences already in place at many of our schools, so that other schools can learn from those practices.
- Materials schools can customize to encourage participation, such as sample parent-teacher conference invitation flyers, signs, and follow-up notes.
- Materials schools can customize that describe curriculum changes as the school begins to implement the new Common Core standards.

2 Help families identify and advocate for the right school for their child

The new school options we have created provide multiple opportunities for families to place their child at a school with the right profile for their child. We recognize our responsibility

to make our admissions process more transparent, and we will do so by sharing all relevant information about schools and making this information easy for parents to find so that families will be empowered when seeking the best options for their children. We will use online technology to facilitate a robust and thoughtful school selection process. We will also listen to concerns families have about the schools in their communities and provide information to support advocacy for new school options.

3 Make the school system more open and accessible

Families need to know who to call when they have a question or concern about their child's education. Schools must be responsive and commit to engaging their students' families. The Department will make sure that in cases in which schools cannot resolve concerns, families know where to go. Schools will give parents information about school support resources, such as parent coordinators and networks, and the Department's website will contain information about useful Department contacts.

We will:

- Develop and roll out new standards for school and family partnerships. These standards will be used to evaluate how well each school is doing to inform and engage parents and create a parent-friendly environment.

- Create a Citywide “Parent Academy” aimed at establishing informed and involved parent leaders throughout the school system. Our Parent Academy will provide trainings, workshops, and support to school-based family volunteers and parent coordinators.
- Re-imagine and redefine the role of parent coordinators to better support school communities, establishing clear guidelines and expectations for this critical link between parents and school communities. We will work with the community superintendents’ offices to improve collaboration with, and support to, parent coordinators.

4 Refine our process for capturing family feedback

To be true partners in improving our schools, we need to be accountable to families and have an ongoing, systematic way of hearing their concerns. Building on the success of our School Survey, through which individual schools are held accountable for parent satisfaction, we launched the Chancellor’s Family Feedback Form this summer. As we continue to refine the ways we hold schools accountable for student success, we will consider new ways of incorporating parents’ perspectives. We will also use our findings to improve our partnerships with families. For example:

- As part of the Chancellor’s commitment to turn around middle school performance, we will convene a working group of middle school parents, parent coordinators,

teachers, and principals to help determine the best ways to encourage and maintain parent involvement during a child’s middle school years. Through the insights of the working group, we will furnish each middle school with tactics to improve communication between middle schools and parents to ensure students do not get lost and are on track for success.

Informed and involved parents and families lead to better results for students and more successful schools.





JOIN US TO RAISE THE BAR

The world is rapidly changing. Higher levels of educational achievement and more complex skills are required to compete and thrive in the workforce. College, once a goal for a few students, has now become a requirement for many good jobs and to build economic security. Times have changed, and so must our system of education. To prepare our children for success in college, careers, and life, our City's schools must expect and support higher learning standards that are embraced by informed and engaged families.

We are committed to bringing our more than 1,700 public schools up to the task: to prepare our children to fulfill their potential and take over as the next generation of leaders. Students, teachers, parents, and families are more than the core of this effort — together they are the beating heart of our City.

With all of us working together, we can meet the challenge. We're committed and optimistic. We see 1.1 million opportunities to succeed every day. Join us.

“To prepare our students for college and careers in today's world, we need to work together. Join us to inspire school and student success.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis M. Walcott". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor



Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott
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<http://schools.nyc.gov>

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