



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Parents, Advocates, and Elected Officials Call on D.O.E to Ensure “Sanctuary Schools” as Hate Crimes Spike** *DOE Should Make Proper Investments in Staff Trainings to Tackle Bias, and Parent Workshops on Legal Rights*

**NEW YORK CITY** (December 8, 2016) – Parents from the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) gathered on the steps of Tweed to call on the NYC Department of Education to do much more to make schools a refuge from racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia for students and families in the current national atmosphere. In light of the surge of racist and anti-immigrant harassment and crimes in NYC and nationally, CEJ believes that the DOE must take a much more proactive role in equipping teachers and school staff to support students who are exposed daily to hateful speech and acts through their own experiences, friends and family, and the media; and families who are being threatened with discriminatory federal policies.

With at least half a million students whose families are immigrants to this country, and hundreds of thousands of Muslim students, undocumented students, LGBTQ students, Jewish students, girls and other identities that are targets in the current political climate, the DOE has an imperative to help schools build strong expertise in confronting racism and bias, and support schools to be hubs for critical information on legal rights and recourses. Beyond this moment, schools should strive to be sanctuaries from all types of hate and dehumanizing experiences including discriminatory policing practices that disproportionately affect communities of color.

“Communities of color across the country are now being actively subject to hate speech and violent incidents and it has a direct effect on our students in NYC. Whether they have experienced this hate personally or heard about it from friends and family, or the media; they are struggling to understand and make their place in this difficult environment, and they need guidance from the adults around them. The DOE has a responsibility to make schools sanctuaries and models of how to combat racism, xenophobia and all forms of hate. We call on the DOE and the Mayor to step up their leadership in equipping school staff and parents with the information and skills they need to support young people for the long haul under the next presidential administration,” **said Natasha Capers Coordinator Coalition for Educational Justice.**

“We know that the teaching force is not a direct reflection of the diversity that exists in schools, which increases the necessity to ensure teachers and staff are better equipped to address student needs. In light of the political and social climate of New York, the D.O.E has, in many ways, acknowledged the serious threat that students, and especially students of color may be facing. For the D.O.E to make this acknowledgement and then fail to take the proper steps in remedying this issue by providing more anti-bias and anti-racist teacher trainings is a failure of leadership,” **said Zakiyah Ansari, Advocacy Director, Alliance for Quality Education.**

"Educators must be equipped to teach students how to respond positively to the uptick of bias incidents in the US," **said NYC Council Education Committee Chairperson Daniel Dromm.** "These traumatic events affect our child inside and outside of the classroom, even if they are not the direct targets of such attacks. I call upon the NYC Department of Education to prioritize the

training of 600 educators so that they can begin to address this pressing concern in our public schools."

In a Trump administration driven by hatred and bigotry, New York City's institutions need to stand up for our most vulnerable constituents, **says Council Member Brad Lander.** "The NYC Department of Education has the opportunity to provide parents, students, teachers and administrators across the entire city with the tools they need to create safe spaces, to ensure our communities know their rights, and to champion NYC's values of justice and inclusion."

"I call on the DOE to follow the lead of the New York City Council -- which two days ago passed a resolution reaffirming New York City's status as a sanctuary city -- and ensure that all DOE schools are "sanctuary schools," not only in name, but in practice. Now, more than ever, the DOE must be proactive in making schools a safe place for learning and growing, a refuge from the hate that our children are witnessing and experiencing out in the world. They can do this now by investing in teacher and staff trainings to fight against racism and bias on school grounds and by empowering parents to identify and report violations of their rights. I'm sending a message to my immigrant, Muslim, LGBTQ, Jewish students and all other students and their families who are feeling threatened and scared: the New York City Council is here to protect and defend you, and we will put pressure on the DOE to commit to do the same," **said Carlos Menchaca NYC City Councilmember.**

"Whether confronted with overt hate, or covert bias, children continue to suffer, while many teachers, principals, and school staff have no idea how to respond to this crisis. The time is now for New York City to show leadership by creating public schools that build and sustain the self-esteem and self worth of all children," **said Jamaal Bowman, Principal, Cornerstone Academy for Social Action.** "To accomplish this, we must implement a culturally relevant curriculum in every school, and ensure that all Department of Education employees are trained in anti racist and anti bias pedagogy."

"Our work as educators goes deeper than just content and skill acquisition. In order to systemically shift performance trends, create valuable schools that are connected to communities and build safe places that affirm students and set the tone for risk taking and learning- we must be tuned into the realities of our world and the deep implications of our histories, identities, power structures and the subsequent traumas that manifest as a result of our national truths. Creating space for educators to strengthen their understanding and language around issues of identity and oppression helps to cultivate schools that are deeply tuned into our students and their families," **said Principal Brandon Cardet-Hernandez Principal, Bronx Academy of Letters.**

"If teachers cannot meet the cultural needs of students in NYC, one of the most diverse cities on the planet; they themselves will be a wall between their students and their education. Their job would be pointless. Teacher-student relationships are essential in order to learn!" **said Iman Abdul, student, Education Consultancy Intern, City College of New York.**

"When students are being harassed or bullied in school, they don't always tell their parents, so it is very important for schools to take affirmative steps to prevent this behavior and not rely on parents to complain. Also, we've heard from parents who themselves felt harassed or discriminated against in their interactions with their schools or enrollment centers. Staff should be trained to make all families feel welcome and respected," **said Kim Sweet, Executive Director Advocates for Children.**

“The youth of IntegrateNYC4me have requested mandatory professional development and course offerings that train and teach educators and students on the history, the beauty, the variety, and the dynamics of building relationships across the many groups who love and learn in our school system. We support the rapid expansion of the Critically Conscious Educator Series and ask that it be done in a way that supports and honors our fearless educators and resilient students, **said Sarah Camiscoli, Founder IntegrateNYC4Me, Teacher District 7.**

"Over the past several years, racial tensions in the United States have created a new sense of urgency and an incentive to eradicate racial divisions in our K-12 educational system, college campuses, and society at large. In this environment, prospective, novice and veteran educators need additional support to foster positive school climates and assure that all students, especially students of color, can achieve their fullest potential and graduate from high school ready to participate in a culturally and linguistically diverse society," **said Amy Stuart-Wells, co-Director of The Public Good Project and the Reimagining Education Summer Institute at Teachers College, Columbia University**

“At this critical juncture in our national political and cultural debate, we call on our government leaders and public institutions, like schools, to do more to create an environment that fosters safety, awareness and justice, especially amongst our youth,” **stated Jose Calderon, President of the Hispanic Federation.** “We appreciate Chancellor Fariña’s and the New York City Department of Education’s recent efforts to address bullying and acts of intolerance before, during and following the recent election, but more must be done. We support the call for expanded anti-bias training and support for teaching practitioners, parent coordinators, community members, and all those who are affected by the wave of post-election hate crimes.”

"Every child has the right to a safe and equal learning environment. Therefore, we are calling upon the New York City Department of Education to ensure that all schools will be sanctuaries for our youngest citizens. School should be a place free of racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia. After the November election, steps need to be taken now to protect students who are culturally and linguistically diverse," **said Bertha Lewis, President and Founder of The Black Institute.**