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PRESS RELEASE

Parents Launch Campaign to Demand City Schools Become More Responsive to the Diverse Cultures of Students

New York, NY (March 25, 2017) - A broad coalition of parents, education advocates, and elected officials joined the city's largest parent-led organization, the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), to call on the de Blasio administration to make schools more inclusive and responsive to the diverse students in NYC public schools through Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). As an increasing number of young people are experiencing fears and anxieties about their safety and wellbeing, parents demand that the administration help schools fortify and protect students against the inundation of negative messages that they and their people are not valuable or wanted. Parents claim that most schools are not trained or prepared to arm students with a deep knowledge and pride in who they are and where they come from, and furthermore unequipped to create true oases from racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism and other biases.

Today, CEJ released a detailed platform for how the DOE can scale up and expand current efforts around culturally responsive education to reach many hundreds more schools. With at least half a million students from immigrant families, and hundreds of thousands of Muslim students, undocumented students, LGBTQ students, Jewish students, girls and other identities that have increasingly been targets of harassment and discrimination, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) has an imperative to build strong practices in confronting racism and bias at every level of schooling.

Performers at the event included Urban Word, Batalá New York, El Puente dancers, and Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy. Elected officials endorsing the platform include: Councilmember Danny Dromm, Councilmember Brad Lander, Councilmember Carlos Menchaca, Councilmember Antonio Reynoso, Councilmember Donovan Richards, Councilmember Helen Rosenthal, Councilmember Deborah Rose, Councilmember Ritchie Torres, Councilmember Steve Levin, Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez, and the Progressive Caucus of the NYC City Council. Organizations endorsing the platform include Make the Road New York, New York Communities for Change, New Settlement Parent Action Committee, Alliance for Quality Education, Urban Youth Collaborative, New York Appleseed, Muslim Community Network, Justice League, IntegrateNYC4Me, Masa, African Communities Together, Girls for Gender Equity, Advocates for Children, New York Immigration Coalition, Hispanic Federation, Groundswell, Coalition for Asian-American Children and Families, Arab-American Association, Community Service Society, Brooklyn Movement Center and more.

“We call on the DOE and the Mayor to make it a priority now and for the next mayoral term that NYC schools become national models of combatting racism, xenophobia and all forms of bias in curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. Hate speech and violent incidents against people of color are even more sharply visible in this country now, and that 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 in the media, they are struggling to understand and make their place in this difficult environment. Our schools should be place that affirm students their cultures and identities,” said **Natasha Capers, Coordinator of the Coalition for Educational Justice.**

"More than 180 languages are spoken in public school families' homes, which underscores the stunning diversity in our schools," said **Steven Choi, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition.** "Schools' curriculum, staff, and programs need to reflect and respect students' backgrounds in order for immigrant students and parents to feel welcome and to fuel students' academic success."

"If children in communities of color don't have access to high-quality schools and culturally-affirming curricula and pedagogy, they will never have a real opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and achieve the American dream" said **Public Advocate Letitia James.** "All children have the right to a fair and equitable education that instills knowledge and pride in their own heritage, and the diversity of NYC. Education can only be the great equalizer if it is culturally responsive to all communities in our City."

“Hispanic Federation stands with the Coalition for Education Justice in urging City Hall and the Department of Education to enhance students’ education through well-rounded curricula that incorporates diverse culture and heritage. Now more than ever, it’s critical that we ensure our schools are safe havens for our students and beacons of inclusion and representation. Students of all backgrounds deserve an education that connects academic study to contemporary issues, and is grounded in understanding the rich history and cultures of the NYC student population” said **Jose Calderon, President of the Hispanic Federation.**

“We’re in a political climate that’s being exasperated, if not caused, by our inabilities to understand and respect those different than ourselves. To stop this, we have to empower New York City schools, parents, educators, and most importantly, our children to start changing these conversations,” said **Council Member Brad Lander.** “I stand with the Coalition for Education Justice because it’s imperative that the Department of Education lead the conversation on how to eradicate racial disparities in the system, in order to create a learning environment that’s fun, engaging, and most importantly safe. These empowered students will ensure that our communities, that New York City, will prosper and stay united.”

“The platform and recommendations created by the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) will help us build the safe and nurturing learning environment our students deserve,” said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca.** “Their campaign to bring Culturally Responsive Education to DOE schools shows how we can inform, empower and protect our kids.”

Matt Gonzalez from New York Appleseed said, “In a moment when the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable students is under attack, it is critical that we equip New York City educators with the

tools needed to support the development of protective and transformative educational environments that disrupt racism and bias as they manifest in our schools. This is why we stand with CEJ's proposal."

"In efforts to support our City's families, I am proud to stand with the Coalition for Educational Justice in their advocacy for education that is relevant and culturally responsive," said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**. "This includes a curriculum that highlights contributions made by other cultures and the LGBTQ community and a strong focus on restorative justice. For too long, students have been penalized in a system that does more to condemn differences as oppose to celebrate and promote them. As our City stands up to leadership in D.C. that will continue to divide and drive hate, we must do right by New Yorkers by promoting diversity in our neighborhoods".

Council Member Deborah Rose said, "The jobs of tomorrow will be filled by people who can think analytically and creatively, and we can equip today's students with those skills by bringing Culturally Responsive Education into our schools. Research has found that academic study that is rooted in contemporary issues and students' experiences increases student participation, confidence, academic achievement and graduation rates. I call on the Department of Education to embrace Culturally Responsive Education so that our students fall in love with learning and become better prepared for tomorrows challenges and opportunities."

Kim Sweet from Advocates for Children said, "All parents want their children to attend schools where they feel welcome, valued, and safe. New York City should set an example for the country in embracing Culturally Responsive Education."

"In every sense of the word community, diversity is proven to result in a stronger, more accepting community," said **Council Member Donovan Richards**. "Delivering a Culturally Responsive Education will help turn our schools into diverse communities that have staff and a curriculum that represent the diversity of the student population. Having instructors and lessons that reflect the backgrounds of a variety of students will allow them to be more comfortable in the classroom, as well as expanding exposure to different cultures, which promotes acceptance and tolerance for our future generation."

Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland said, "Our schools are safe havens, and we will not allow the hatred this country is facing to seep into our children's education. New York City is a sanctuary city that is inclusive of all races, cultures and creeds. Every student can rest assured that their views will be respected."

Maria Gil, a parent leader with Make the Road New York said, "I have always wanted children to come to their classrooms and feel at home in a cultural environment where they see themselves reflected. And now that we see an increase in racism in this country, it is time to really have an education that is culturally responsive. I asked my daughter, who is in college, if during her years in school she had ever felt included in the school community as a Latina and a Mexican and she told me no, that her schools always thought she was a good student, but they never saw the potential that she has. CEJ parents want the DOE to expand culturally responsive education so that all children, no matter race or religion or gender, can feel welcome in their schools and have the right to a good education."

“I wholeheartedly support the Coalition for Educational Justice’s effort to integrate Culturally Responsive Education into our public schools,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**. “Education is a critical tool in the fight for social and economic equality, making it imperative that our schools embrace all racial and cultural identities to help our students succeed. CEJ’s proposed platform to fully include and educate students of all genders, races, and abilities will instill in our students mutual respect, a sense of belonging, and a love of learning.”

“New York City needs to move towards embracing an educational curriculum representative of the diversity of this city. Culturally responsive education is always appropriate, and in this moment it is especially important to lift up our marginalized students and let them know they matter and have a place in what they learn.” said **Zakiyah Ansari, Advocacy Director of the Alliance for Quality Education**.

“Justice League NYC’s parent organization, Gathering for Justice, was founded in 2005 by Harry Belafonte after he saw a news report of a 5-year old Black girl being handcuffed and arrested in her Florida classroom for ‘being unruly’,” said **Justice League NYC**. “Since then, we have been fighting to end the criminalization of young people in the public school system; and essential to this process is transforming the consciousness and practices of school system staff to respect and reflect students’ racial and cultural backgrounds. CEJ’s proposal for Culturally Responsive Education will head public schools toward ending the racial inequities plaguing our young people.”