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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONE HUNDRED PARENTS, STUDENTS, ELECTED OFFICIALS RALLIED FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION AS DE BLASIO DEBATED SCHOOL CONTROL AT CITY HALL

June 2017 – A coalition of 100 parents, students, elected officials, advocates and community members encouraged Mayor Bill de Blasio to adopt a “Culturally Responsive Education” program as the mayor advocated for control over New York City’s public schools inside City Hall.

“Whether or not the Mayor has control of the schools, racism and bias in schools need to be addressed,” said Natasha Capers, coordinator of the Coalition for Educational Justice, CEJ, which staged the rally outside near the steps of City Hall.

“Mayoral control allows mayoral leadership on important issues that affect ALL 1.1 million students in NYC, and we're calling on the Mayor to use that leadership to make culturally responsive education a centerpiece of his second term education agenda,” said Capers.

Capers was joined by City Council Education Committee Chair Daniel Dromm; City Councilman Brad Lander; Matt Gonzales, director of the School Diversity Project at NY Appleseed; Kim Sykes, education advocacy director with Immigration Coalition; Kaiying Guo, youth leader at Coalition for Asian American, Bonnie Tang, youth leader at Coalition for Asian American Children and Families; Parent leaders Veronica Morales, and Fatoumata Kaba along with Dr Debbie Almonaster with Bridging Cultural Groups; Malachi Davidson with Rockaway Youth Task Force.

"Culturally responsive education in NYC public schools is vitally important to our students," said Dromm. "From coast to coast, this progressive approach to education has an excellent track record. It is high time our city provides students access to the benefits a culturally responsive education and provides. I urge the Mayor to prioritize its implementation in our public school system."

Earlier this month de Blasio unceremoniously unveiled a plan for integrating the city's racially divided schools that has received wide criticism for its lack of vision, substance and solutions. One of the major components the plan lacks is a strategy to address the implicit and overt bias inside schools and within traditional school curriculum, which is necessary to make integrated schools successful for all children.

NYC City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito believes “Culturally Responsive Education” is a viable solution and has called upon New York State to convene a task force to assess the cultural relevance of state learning standards across subject areas in elementary, middle and high schools as well as explore the grounding of standards in core content that challenges racism, ableism, sexism and is LGB and TGNC-affirming. The Speaker is also funding Culturally Responsive Teacher Trainings for over 500 teachers.

De Blasio’s plan calls for diversifying the student body in a small percentage of public schools and encouraging several community school districts to come up with their own diversity plans.

Many schools don’t have the skills and tools they need to teach this diverse student population, said Professor Amy Stuart Wells, professor, sociology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University. “We can’t just focus on diversity of enrollment without also looking at diversity of staffing, curriculum and teaching practices.”

Advocates of “Culturally Responsive Education” like Felicia Alexander, a parent leader with CEJ, say the mayor’s diversity plan doesn’t go far enough and if he is truly committed to racial

justice in NYC schools, he must make it a priority in his second term.

Alexander believes “Culturally Responsive Education, which focuses on anti-bias training for school staff, a rich and diverse curriculum as well as safe and supportive climate and transformative parent engagement help schools navigate these distinctive terrains.

“We need to be very thoughtful about the curriculum and pedagogy used so we don’t end up replicating segregation within our schools,” said Alexander.

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The NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) is a parent-led movement in the city’s public schools. The coalition consists of community-based organizations whose members are parents and community residents whose mission is to ensure every child in NYC receives a quality and well-rounded academic education. For more information, visit www.nyccej.org