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February 21, 2011

Ms. Cathleen Black  
New York City School Chancellor  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Black,

I am writing to express my opposition to the phase-out and replacement of 25 schools throughout New York City. These schools, which are considered failing or underperforming by the New York City Department of Education (DOE), should not be closed, but rather support mechanisms should be put in place that strengthen and improve schools. Our priority must be fixing schools that are underperforming, giving them the tools and resources to succeed. The disruption and displacement that occurs as a result of school closures has only undermined our children's ability to learn and become productive citizens and leaders.

Our city has endured a decade of this failed strategy. Every year, parents, educators, students, and community leaders voice their opposition to public school closures. Every year, we see an increase in the number of schools recommended for closure by the DOE, as if this is the only option for our children and their families. Our city's educational system has found itself in a vicious cycle that quite frankly has not proven to be an effective strategy in improving student performance.

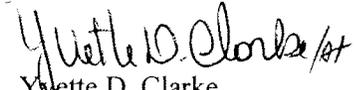
I urge you to consider the benefits of restoring these schools instead of giving up on them and shutting them down. Phasing out and closing our public schools has not addressed the real problem that is at the heart of our city's struggling education system. As long as these measures continue to exist as a "solution," our teachers, parents, but most importantly, our students will no longer have confidence in our city's ability to provide a quality education. There is a loss of trust and confidence in the women and men, who have been entrusted with the great responsibility of governing the largest public educational system in the United States. You have been empowered to restore this breach in trust and confidence, and you can begin by putting support mechanisms in place to strengthen our struggling schools.

The DOE must engage education stakeholders and work with them to determine common sense solutions and innovative ways to reform our educational system. Simply shutting down our schools is not the answer. It is our children, our future leaders, who are bearing the brunt of this problem. They deserve better.

I hope you will take my concerns, and the concerns of all New Yorkers, to heart and develop more pragmatic solutions to fixing our education system, because our children, and our future, depend on it.

I thank you for your willingness to serve our city's children and families. It is my hope that you will give my concerns and the concerns of those I represent your earnest consideration. Clearly, it is passed time for us to deploy new strategies for success in the education of New York City's students.

Sincerely,

  
Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress