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Hon. David M. Steiner  
Commissioner of Education  
New York State Education Department  
Albany, NY 12234

December 29, 2009

Dear Commissioner Steiner:

The Council of School Superintendents (THE COUNCIL) has long advocated for initiatives consistent with those encompassed in the state's Race to the Top (RTTT) application and supporting documents. Many of those priorities are reflected in our 2007 *Education is a Civil Right* reform agenda, and in our August 31<sup>st</sup> letter to you outlining the hopes and concerns of superintendents across the state.

We see securing a RTTT grant as the state's best hope for achieving these crucial structural improvements in education and thereby improving learning opportunities and outcomes for all schoolchildren. Specifically, the state plan would support:

- Updating state learning standards, including prioritizing the development of higher order thinking skills, and components of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy – proficiency in economics, technology and the arts;
- Improving state assessments, so that they measure what matters (not merely what is easy to measure), and produce information that teachers and schools can use to improve instruction;
- Facilitating the construction of a “P-20” data system, giving educators, families, researchers and policymakers more and better data and tying that data into feedback loops that can reinforce sound research and practice;
- Improving teaching and school leadership, and
- Muscular interventions in chronically dysfunctional schools and districts.

THE COUNCIL is particularly heartened by your recognition of the importance of strong leadership, and the RTTT application's support of leadership development. Moreover, your plan would enhance system-wide accountability by strengthening the prerogatives school and district leaders exercise in managing staff and resources.

Not only would Race to the Top funding provide an otherwise unattainable enhancement to the State Education Department's capacity to lay the cornerstones of statewide reform, it would also assist school districts in carrying out their essential contributions to that work.

Some aspects of the state plan require amendments to state law approved by the State Legislature and Governor. We will collaborate with you and the Board of Regents to ensure that the legislative process maintains fidelity to the principles outlined in the state application.

One controversial element of your legislative plan calls for alterations in the state's laws governing charter schools. THE COUNCIL was alone among statewide public education organizations in not opposing the state's original 1998 charter school statute. We did, however, express deep concerns over the adversarial financing mechanism incorporated in that law and those concerns have been justified by experience. We remain committed to amendments that facilitate the development of sound charter schools by ensuring that charters remain a commodity, and that diminish the deleterious effects of the

#### NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS


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current financing system. Instead of a crude adjustment in the charter cap, we support exempting from caps any charter schools supported by local school district leadership – one obvious measure of quality. In New York City alone this approach would alleviate demand pressures by making at least 57 new charters available instantly.

You have acknowledged that many aspects of the state plan will require extensive refinement. We appreciate your pledge of meaningful engagement with the field and our leadership as concepts are translated into programs and procedures or enacted into regulation.

As a representative body of school superintendents from districts across the entire state, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to academic excellence for every student. We are therefore pleased to offer this letter of support for the Race to the Top application, which will be instrumental to key reforms and to supporting the many tremendously successful efforts already taking place in school districts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. L. Oliver Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr. L. Oliver Robinson  
President  
New York State Council of School Superintendents