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February 21, 2017

Hon. James S. Oddo
President, Borough of Staten Island
Borough Hall
10 Richmond Terrace
Staten Island, NY 10301

Dear Borough President Oddo:

Thank you for your letter to Chancellor Fariña regarding support for students with print-based challenges. We appreciate you sharing your concerns and thoughts with us.

Our commitment is to provide all students with the educational foundation to succeed later in life by providing access to rigorous instruction in the most inclusive setting that is appropriate. Per NYSED regulations, every school is required to have a response to intervention (RtI) protocol in place. While there is no reliable general screener for dyslexia, RtI protocols are the first step in an organic process where students with print-based disabilities can be identified, evaluated, and receive interventions where needed. We have found this to be the most effective means of supporting students with print-based disabilities, as it has strong core instruction as its base and students are continually exposed to rigorous academic work throughout the process. We provide a large number of trainings to schools on this topic.

Our commitment is to provide schools with the tools needed to identify the reading issues and provide appropriate interventions as quickly and efficiently as possible, and in accordance with the legal requirements of referral and parental consent prior to conducting an evaluation. While a neuropsychological evaluation is useful in some contexts, the process may be lengthy and does not determine an immediate course of action for students to become readers and writers. RtI protocols meet this commitment better than the alternative.

We currently have multiple reading initiatives in place on Staten Island. We have provided reading intervention training to at least one person in 92% of Staten Island elementary schools, and there are more than 50 Staten Island Individualized Education Program (IEP) teachers engaged in a multi-year plan focused on training in assessments and reading intervention. This year we also started a limited literacy assessment pilot in three schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In consultation with an external expert from the University of Connecticut, these schools received training in data-based individualization (DBI) and used curriculum-embedded tools from Vanderbilt University. Building on this work, we plan to expand our literacy assessment pilot next year by including new curriculum-embedded screeners and expanding this program to new schools, including some on Staten Island. These tools will allow our trained staff to

determine specific print-based disability challenges and provide appropriate supports to individual students.

We believe this effort will support teachers to meaningfully intervene with their students and augment current initiatives, all the while strengthening support for students next year and in to the future.

Thank you again for your letter and for your advocacy on behalf of the City's students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Weinberg', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Phil Weinberg
Deputy Chancellor
Division of Teaching & Learning

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Corinne Rello-Anselmi', written in a cursive style.

Corinne Rello-Anselmi
Deputy Chancellor
Division of Specialized Instruction & Student Support