



Education Policy Speech
City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn
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The New School

In 1913 my grandfather, John Callaghan, left Ireland on a ship headed for America. He had a third grade education, and a few dollars in his pocket.

He moved to a boarding house in the East 40s, and got a job as a milkman. He went on to become a firefighter with the FDNY, and worked his way up to battalion chief.

He got married, saved up enough money to move to a bigger apartment in Inwood, and rent a little bungalow in the Rockaways during the summer. And he sent my mother and my aunt to Mount Saint Vincent College, so they would have even bigger opportunities than he did.

For my grandparents, the path out of poverty required working 24/7. But for my parents' generation it took more than hard work to make it to the middle class – it took an education.

And that's what my mother, a social worker, and my father, a union electrical worker, taught me and my sister. They told us that we could be anything we wanted as long as we did well in school. And that's even truer for children today.

Middle class jobs that pay a middle class salary demand high school or college level skills.

Trade industry jobs like welding require an understanding of geometry and engineering.

Employees at manufacturing firms have to run computers that operate assembly lines.

If we want to keep New York City a place of opportunity for middle class families, and if we want to make it a place where people can realize the American Dream, moving their family into the middle class like my grandparents did, we need a public education system that prepares every student for the jobs of the 21st century.

Mayoral Control has given us unprecedented potential to build that education system. And Mayor Bloomberg and the DOE have taken key steps in the right direction. But I don't think anyone in this room, or anywhere in the five boroughs, would argue that our schools are where they need to be.

Graduation rates have risen across the city by almost 15% since 2005, but they're still not nearly high enough. And only one in four students graduates ready to go to college. For black and Latino students, that rate drops to just 13%.

So today I'm going to outline a four-point strategy that will pave the way for a new century of opportunity.

Number one – Best Practices, Better Schools. We identify the best parts of our system - the schools and teachers and principals that are making the biggest difference for our kids. And we use their best practices to lift everybody up and make the whole system stronger.

Number two – Learning 24/7. We make learning something that happens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. That means empowering parents to continue teaching at home, and better engaging families in all parts of the system. And it means extending learning time for our highest need students, and using creative scheduling to make the best use out of all the hours in our school day.

Number three - Community Schools. We make everything kids need available through one strategic, coordinated effort - from after school programs to health care to nutritious meals.

Number four – Innovate to Educate. We adopt a 21st century curriculum that focuses on the

whole child, and recognizes that individual students have individual needs and talents. That means creating the most intensive literacy support program in the country. It also means reducing the amount of time we spend on test prep, so we can focus on skills that prepare students for 21st century careers.

This four point strategy will incorporate and build on education initiatives I've made a top priority for the seven years I've been Speaker. Like our focus on early childhood education – partnering with the DOE to create 4,000 additional full day Pre-K seats, and finally making Kindergarten mandatory in the five boroughs.

Working with Education Committee Chair Robert Jackson, we secured \$25 million dollars to put proven reforms into action in our lowest performing middle schools. And we launched a first of its kind training partnership with CUNY and local tech start-ups, where students gain the real world skills they need to get good paying tech jobs right out of college.

We'll bring all this work and more into a comprehensive approach that improves performance at all our schools, and gives every child the opportunity to excel.

Now let's start with our first idea – Best Practices, Better Schools.

In the last ten years we've collected tons of data on our students. We've used it to make the system more accountable, to let parents know how a school is performing. What we haven't done as well is look closely at our best schools, and principals, and teachers, and figure out what they're doing right so we can put those same techniques into place at similar schools.

A 2008 study of the DOE by the Parthenon Group found that a high school's graduation rate can be pretty accurately predicted by looking at its size and its concentration of high need and overage students. The bigger the school, and the more high need kids in that school, the lower the graduation rate.

But there was one large high school, just one in the whole study, that beat the odds. Harry

Truman High School in the Bronx.

The DOE looked at this Parthenon study and said “we need to close big schools and open more small schools”.

Now look, I support small schools. I went to a small high school, and I know first-hand that they work for a lot of students. But while we’re opening new small schools, why aren’t we at the same time looking at what’s worked at Truman, and applying those techniques to other big schools before they have to close?

Truman is doing lots of great things that can be replicated elsewhere. 9th graders who are behind in math and writing get enrolled in a study skills “boot camp” on top of their regular classes. Students are divided into different “academies” that focus instruction on one of several career tracks.

None of these programs required additional taxpayer dollars. But they did take years of hard work, careful planning, and thoughtful use of private donations led by Principal Sana Nasser and a fantastic team of educators, administrators and families.

And I want to thank Sana, who’s here today, for all of their incredible work.

Truman is far from the only school that’s made great gains against great odds. There are lessons we can learn from schools of every shape and size - all over the city.

So we are currently in discussions with several imminent researchers including Columbia Teachers College, to take the lead on an initiative we’re calling the Systemwide Success Study. This will be an in depth analysis of what techniques from our best performing schools have proven most successful with different types of students. We’ll clearly identify best practices, and apply them to schools with similar populations or similar challenges so every school can reach its maximum potential.

By the way, this is how we can finally make good on the promise of charter schools. I support charter schools. They're a part of our system, and I believe we waste far too much time and energy in this city debating something that's already been decided.

But when we first opened the door to charters, we promised that they'd be laboratories for innovation - and we'd take their most successful strategies citywide.

Well it's been ten years. And unless your child goes to a charter school, you probably haven't seen any benefit. With our Systemwide Success Study, we can finally use charters in the way they were intended - figure out what the best ones are doing right and use that knowledge to help every school improve.

Now we won't just hand out a list of good ideas and leave schools to do the rest. We'll work with school leaders to develop a strategy for implementation, help them leverage outside resources, and draw in community partners to make new programs more effective.

And we don't have to wait for a school to get bad grades on its report card before we provide them with some extra support. We'll create a red alert system for struggling schools, looking at early indicators like absentee and graduation rates, and identify them well before they're slated to close.

We'll provide them the support they need to put ideas from our Systemwide Success Study into action. And most importantly, we'll give them time to turn things around, not just wait a year and pull the plug.

There might be some schools that we aren't able to save, and we can't continue to send our children to schools that don't provide a quality education. But instead of treating school closings like a goal in itself, we should see it as a last resort when all else has failed. And we should make fixing that school not just the responsibility of the principal and teachers, but city government and the entire community.

Bill Clinton said that “there’s nothing wrong in America that can’t be fixed by what’s right in America.” We’ll that’s true here, too. There’s nothing wrong with our schools that can’t be fixed with what’s right about our schools.

And guided by that same principle, we’re going to identify our very best teachers, and tap them to work with their colleagues to help everyone excel.

Studies show that out of all the factors that affect student achievement, the most important is having the best teachers.

And the great news is, we don’t need to hire consultants to come and tell our teachers how to teach. We have experts of our own – the thousands of experienced, top performing teachers spread throughout our 1,700 schools.

I’m proposing a Mentor Teacher program, where every new teacher in our public school system receives a year of intensive hands-on support from one of our city’s best teachers.

Right now professional development is wildly inconsistent. So I propose that we take some of the \$450 million we spend on professional development each year and use it to create a corps of Mentor Teachers, who will help develop and support our newest educators.

So even if your child has a first year teacher, they’ll benefit from the experience of one of our city’s best. They’ll help new teachers develop effective strategies for supporting all students, including English language learners, and kids with special needs.

We’ll base our program on a model that’s been tremendously successful in Montgomery County, Maryland. It’s been part of a comprehensive strategy that’s given them the highest graduation rates of any large school district in the country.

We'll identify our top teachers and offer them the opportunity to leave the classroom temporarily to take on the challenge and responsibility of mentoring our novice teachers. We'll enroll them in an elite master class run by CUNY, where they share best practices and learn techniques for working with colleagues.

After two years of service as a Mentor Teacher, they'll return to the classroom, ensuring that we aren't taking our best educators away from students on a permanent basis. And over time we're building up a reserve of expert teachers at schools all over the city who can work with their colleagues in both formal and informal ways.

One final point on this subject. Thursday is the deadline for New York City to reach a teacher evaluation deal, or else forfeit millions of dollars in State funds. Contract agreements in both Newark and New Haven have proven you can have an evaluation system that works for everyone. A system that doesn't punish hard working teachers, but instead helps them to improve.

So to both sides I say, we need to lower the temperature of this debate, stop the name calling, stop the finger pointing, and remember the fact that we all share the same goal - providing the best resources for our kids, and preparing them for college and careers. Let's get a deal. This is simply too important for our kids and our city.

This brings me to my second strategy – Learning 24/7. If we want to prepare students for college, and for the middle class jobs of today, we need to recognize that our schools can't do it alone.

Parents are the single most important factor in a child's development. Yet too often we treat them as an afterthought.

Parent involvement isn't just some abstract, kumbaya idea that makes people feel good. Three decades of research has shown that engaging families leads to better attendance, higher grades and test scores, and improved behavior.

Parent engagement has three distinct components: giving parents the tools to help their children succeed; being responsive to parents looking for help; and including parents in decisions about their child's education. Today I'm proposing a package of reforms called Parents Matter, that focuses on all three pieces.

Every parent has questions like, is my child on track to be successful in college? How do I know which books are right for his reading level? Where's the line between helping her with homework and doing the homework for her?

So we'll create an online Parent University, where families can go to learn about everything from nutrition to study skills, and brush up on different class subjects. We'll make these resources available in multiple languages, to support families who come to New York from all over the world.

And we'll expand on the College Readiness Initiative developed by New Visions for Public Schools. They teach parents of ninth graders what students need to prepare for college and careers, and share student data so they know whether their child is staying on track.

And I'm proud to announce today that we're partnering with InsideSchools to launch an online tool to help simplify the complicated school choice system. You enter basic information about your child's academic history and what they're looking for in a school, and you get a side by side comparison of different schools that may be a good fit.

Now not everything requires creating a new program. Sometimes it's just about recommitting to doing something better.

I don't know how many of you know the company Zappos. It's an online shoe retailer. Everyone is shocked that I found a way to work shoes into a speech about education.

Anyway, Zappos is widely recognized as a standout in customer service – bordering on

obsessive. Their operators are instructed to stay on the phone for as long as a customer wants. The longest call to date clocked in at ten and a half hours.

If Zappos can have that level of commitment and urgency when they're dealing with shoes, the greatest city in the world should be able to do the same thing for our parents and children.

We already have the infrastructure in place – our Parent Coordinators and District Family Advocates. And some schools are doing this really well. But we still have a long way to go before every family feels like their concerns are being heard and their problems are being solved.

So the second part of Parents Matter will be a commitment to providing the best customer service to every family. We'll make sure every Parent Coordinator and Family Advocate is fully trained, supported, and resourced. And most importantly, we'll introduce a CompStat for our Parent 311 hotline. We'll track the amount of time it takes for a family's issue to get resolved, and we'll make that information public so we can all be held accountable.

Through Parents Matter we'll also engage parents in relevant decisions and keep them in the loop about changes that affect their child's school.

This is another area where we already have the infrastructure in place. We just need to commit to listen to parents, and take their perspectives seriously.

And any time the DOE rolls out a new policy or program, we need to think about how they might impact families. That's why we have Community Education Councils, and the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Committee. They exist to help us strategize and minimize potential problems. We need to engage them earlier and in more thoughtful ways.

With Parents Matter we'll make parents real partners in our education system, and make sure learning continues at home. But the fact remains - students in New York City still aren't spending enough hours in structured learning environments to compete in a 21st century

economy.

Dozens of studies over the last decade show the same results, particularly among lower performing students. More learning time leads to greater academic achievement, better attendance and more enthusiastic learners.

There are a number of ways that different schools and districts have found to extend learning time. The most comprehensive involves actually increasing the number of hours that both students and teachers are in school. This has been done in charters like KIPP, and it's a key part of the Massachusetts 2020 education plan, which has become a national model.

As you might imagine, extending teachers' hours makes this a particularly expensive approach. So some schools and districts have found more affordable ways to expand learning time. For example, Brooklyn Generation School staggers teacher schedules to give students 20 extra days of instruction each year, without any additional staff costs.

Then there's the 49 schools in our Middle School Quality Initiative - a collaboration between the DOE and the City Council. They've rescheduled their school day to make more time for small group literacy instruction, and it's already showing promising results with both low and high performing kids.

Today I'm proposing that we keep more of our kids in a structured education program until 6pm, five days a week - using a combination of all these models.

We'll start by targeting schools that face bigger challenges - the 100 schools with the highest percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

And we know that adding extra hours doesn't produce better results unless schools are prepared to use that time well. So once again we'll use the result of our Systemwide Success Study. And we'll work with teachers, parents, students, and community groups to determine the best approach for each individual school.

Last week Governor Cuomo announced a competitive grant program to help bring extended learning time to school districts around New York State, and we're grateful to the Governor for this exciting news.

Well I am making this commitment today: I will spend my next year as Speaker, using the full resources of the City Council, working to ensure that New York City gets a major share of those funds.

This takes us to our third strategy. If we want to give more New Yorkers a pathway to the middle class, we have to think about our schools in a much more comprehensive way.

This means expanding on a proposal that I first outlined in my State of the City Address last year – bringing a more comprehensive community schools approach to the five boroughs.

The community school model focuses on the question every one of us should be asking every single day. What do our children need?

Yes - they need great teachers, and great principals, and great parents. But that's not all they need to be successful.

Just because you have a great teacher, that doesn't mean we've removed all the barriers that can make it harder for you to learn. You need to be able to see a doctor when you're sick. You need physical activity and healthy meals. You need tutoring and after school programs, internships and summer jobs.

Right now there are people across the city providing these kinds of services and more. But we're not all working together. Community schools recognize that we can only achieve great results if everyone works strategically, towards the same specific goals.

This also means that educators need to coordinate at every level, even if they aren't in the same

schools. So the preschool is teaching vocabulary that will get kids reading at grade level when they reach elementary school. And high school students are learning study skills so they can manage their time in college.

This model has produced great results in cities like Houston, Oakland, and Cincinnati.

I recently visited a school in Cincinnati that's part of their community schools effort. They have a medical clinic inside their building, where students and their families can get primary care through Medicaid or private insurance, and it doesn't cost the school a dime.

This means that kids aren't missing days of class going to the emergency room after an asthma attack. They just go downstairs and get a prescription for their inhaler.

It's been so successful that they're now opening an eye clinic in the school, to help more kids get glasses so they can read the blackboard.

And on Friday afternoons, a local Food Bank sets up in the school cafeteria and gives out healthy food, to make sure students are eating right even on the weekend.

All these individual pieces come together to make a huge difference in student performance.

High school graduation rates in Cincinnati have climbed from 51% to 83%.

We've started rolling out community schools in targeted neighborhoods here in New York City. The Council recently launched a partnership with the DOE and a group called Zone 126 to bring community schools to Western Queens. There's great work being done in other neighborhoods by the UFT, the Children's Aid Society, Chancellor Walcott and so many others.

But if we want to take it to the next level, we can't just take a piecemeal approach. We need a coordinated, citywide effort.

In Cincinnati, they pulled all stakeholders together into a single citywide partnership with a single set of goals.

Compare that to New York City. Over the course of a single day, a child might interact with programs run by half a dozen city agencies.

His school is operated by the DOE, but his after school program is run by the Department of Youth and Community Development. He gets food stamps through the Human Resources Administration, and attends a clinic run by the Department of Health.

And if you think all of these agencies are talking to each other, coordinating strategies and techniques, think again.

We found this out the hard way when I first started working to expand access to full day Pre-K, back in 2006. We wanted to know how many full day seats there were in different neighborhoods.

Well we discovered that the DOE didn't have information on what classes were being funded through ACS, and ACS didn't know how many classes were being offered by DOE.

If we can't even coordinate programs across City agencies, how are we going to manage a community schools effort - that brings together hundreds of community groups, business leaders, service providers, families and schools, in dozens of diverse neighborhoods?

We can do better.

That's why I propose that we create a new office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and Children, to oversee all agencies that work directly with children, and better coordinate the many services available to kids and their families.

Not only will this help provide better oversight and eliminate redundancy, it'll send a powerful message that New York City is focused on the whole child, and dedicated to addressing all of a student's needs.

Now we've reached our fourth and final strategy. To prepare students for college and careers, we need an innovative curriculum that focuses on the needs of individual students. We need to start with the fundamentals, but we also need to recognize that the middle class jobs of the 21st century require more than just Math and English Language proficiency.

New York City is a place that understands the value of art and culture and of thinking in new, creative ways. We need a school system that makes time for science and technology, art and music, physical education, and creative thinking. And that's simply not possible in a system where everything builds towards a series of standardized tests.

I recently spoke with the mother of two girls in Brooklyn public schools. She told me that her third grader spent nearly a month of class time on test prep, six days taking tests, and three more days doing busy work while her teacher was off-site grading the tests.

Then, on top of all the other tests that students currently take, they also participate in field testing. As much as 30 percent of all questions on state exams don't even count towards a student's score. They exist solely to help testing companies try out new test questions.

Here we are - trying to give kids more constructive learning time. And these pointless questions are adding nearly two extra days of testing time.

Meanwhile, students in 47 schools take an additional field test made up of nothing but trial questions. We pay companies like Pearson millions of dollars to administer standardized tests. I think they can afford to test new questions without dumping the burden on our kids and teachers.

These field tests are a waste of time, plain and simple, and I propose we do away with them immediately.

Now the problem isn't just the amount of time kids spend taking tests. It's the time they spend preparing for tests in a way that's disconnected from the skills they really need for college and beyond.

Testing needs to be a part of how we measure student achievement, but not the only way we measure achievement. Some schools use alternative assessments that are even more effective at measuring student performance, and holding everyone accountable.

Like portfolio assessments, where teachers evaluate a collection of student work that showcases the information they learned and progress they made throughout the year. Portfolios are already being used at several of the city's top performing schools, and I propose we continue to expand these and other alternative assessments.

Eliminating field tests and looking at different ways of assessing student performance. This will free up time to focus on the skills our students need to stay competitive in a global economy – skills like computer programming and web design.

Between 2005 and 2010, jobs in New York City's tech sector grew by 30%. And computer skills are now key components of jobs in dozens of other industries, from advertising to manufacturing.

Schools like P-TECH in Crown Heights are leading the way in preparing students for a job in the technology industry.

They partnered with IBM to create a six-year program that provides students with both a regents diploma and an associate's degree in applied science.

Students attend school from 8:30 to 4:00, in 10-period days that intersperse traditional classes like math and English with technology and business-centric courses. We need to bring early

college high schools to even more neighborhoods, and I'll be working with Mayor Bloomberg and CUNY to open three more of these programs in the next year.

But even if you don't go to an early college high school, you should still have the opportunity to learn tech skills that can prepare you for 21st century jobs. So I'm also proposing that we make computer science classes available to students at every high school in New York City. And I'm proud to join with Google and a whole coalition of advocates and business leaders who are pushing to include computer science in the new Common Core Standards.

Technology has changed What we need to teach, but it's also changed How we need to teach.

Thanks to the internet, teachers in any given subject can share lessons and materials with colleagues around the world. They can organize those lessons into online textbooks, which their students can read on tablets in school and at home.

So I'm proposing that we move all our 1,700 schools from a system of textbooks to a system of tablets.

And if you think that sounds like it'll cost a lot of money, listen to this. We currently spend more than a hundred million dollars a year on textbooks. That's enough money to buy tablets for every student in New York City public schools, and cover staff costs to make sure these online texts are meeting rigorous standards.

So a teacher in the Bronx can pull together the most relevant information for his class, and update it throughout the year to stay current. He can incorporate videos and interactive multimedia assignments that better engage kids living in a digital world. By using tablets instead of textbooks, the possibilities really are limitless.

Focusing on technology and 21st century job skills is critical.

But we can't expect kids to learn about web programming if they haven't already learned the fundamentals.

We talk a lot these days about preparing kids for college, and we should. But let's face it. We're not preparing most kids for 4th grade.

Less than 50% of our third graders are reading on grade level. And right now we're not doing nearly enough to help these kids catch up.

Students who are reading below grade level in 3rd grade are four times less likely to get a high school diploma.

If we can't solve this problem, almost nothing else we do can have a real impact.

Reading and writing are the foundation of every aspect of learning. If you can't read and write you're going to have trouble getting a drivers license, let alone a middle class job.

I want New York City to be synonymous with a laser-like focus on reading and writing.

So today I propose we create the most intensive literacy support program in the country, centered on three principles. A strong start. Literacy in every class. And making sure no child falls through the cracks.

One - we build a strong foundation through an integrated pre-K to 3rd grade approach. We align standards, strategies, and curricula, and teachers in every grade engage in joint planning and shared professional development.

Two - we provide training to all teachers at every grade level - no matter what subject they teach - on how to work literacy skills into their classroom. We're seeing this done well at schools like New Dorp High School, where graduation rates soared after they incorporated writing into all of their lessons.

And I want to recognize New Dorp Principal Deirdre DeAngelis, who's here with us today.

Finally, number three - we provide high quality interventions and remedial instruction for students who are falling behind. Because even if we take a proactive approach, there will always be students who need some extra support to excel.

All of the proposals I've discussed today could cost as much as \$300 million dollars. But as I mentioned, we can cover most of these costs by making better use of existing resources – like money we spend on textbooks or professional development.

And I believe we can find additional savings within the DOE's budget, like the \$1.2 billion they spend each year on contracts and consultants. We can effect real change and implement real reforms by being smarter and more coordinated with the dollars we have.

We can't afford to do anything less, not when it comes to something as important as preparing a student for the jobs of the future, or giving a child the gift of reading.

I can remember what a critical role reading played in my life growing up. The hours I spent at my school library, pouring over a rack of dog-eared books - biographies of great women and political leaders. Books that taught me the power ordinary people have to change the world.

We all have stories like that. Every one of us sitting in this room – we are who we are today because of those moments.

Whether you're a student or an educator, an advocate or an elected official. Every one of us had a teacher that opened our eyes to a new possibility. A class that turned us on to a lifelong passion. Or a parent that pushed us, and believed in us, and supported us every step of the way.

We can't let a single one of our children grow up without that same opportunity.

My grandfather was just a teenager when he got on a boat and left Ireland, not knowing if he'd ever see his family again.

He came to New York City with no idea how he would earn a living. But he wasn't afraid. Because he had heard that New York was a place where anything was possible. A place where hard work and a little luck could be your ticket to a better life.

I believe New York is still that place. And when our kids step into a school, we want them to believe that too. We want them to feel that same possibility, that same fearlessness, that same optimism for the future.

People from all over the world still come to New York City by the tens of thousands. They come here because we're known for having the best jobs, the best universities, the best culture. We want middle class families to come here because they know we have the best public schools in the nation.

But that can only happen if we find ways to work together. If we bring all stakeholders to the table, and recognize that everyone has something to contribute.

That's what I've tried to do since the moment I became Speaker – the guiding principle behind all we've been able to accomplish. It's why we brought together a team of experts with wildly different opinions to produce the definitive strategy for middle school reform in New York City. It's how we coordinated multiple agencies and service providers to create better opportunities for early childhood education.

If we can continue that commitment to collaboration - then we can fully tap into the potential of our best schools and teachers and principals. We can make learning something that happens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We can make the entire city part of the education process, and introduce a 21st century curriculum that focuses on the whole child.

Working together we'll build an education system where having choice doesn't mean competing

for scarce resources. Where having autonomy doesn't mean you're on your own.

A system where our leaders have the authority to make bold decisions – and families have a voice in their child's education.

Where we collect the data we need to hold everyone accountable – but don't allow testing to become more important than teaching.

When we look ahead at the next ten years, we have cause for great optimism. The foundation is there. We just need the vision and conviction to build on it.

It won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight. But I believe working together we will get there. And we will keep New York City a place of opportunity for middle class families, today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.