



The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

January 27, 2021

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We are Black and Brown parents from across New York State that are sick and tired of watching politicians like you come to our communities, pander for our votes and then turn your back on us and on our children.

We have watched as you have slashed the budget for education or just barely funded the needs of our children budget after budget. Your actions have only added to the trauma and inequity that our children experience, especially as we deal with the dueling pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism.

This pandemic year has tested all New Yorkers — but for working parents of public school children like us, the going has been especially tough. Our kids' schools were chronically underfunded long before COVID-19, but the threat of 20 percent “rolling” budget cuts translated to historic teacher layoffs for some districts and forced struggling school districts in all corners of the state to stick to remote learning, not for health and safety concerns but due to inadequate funding. As working parents, that means some of us were faced with an impossible choice: go to work and feed our family, or stay home to help our kids learn. Some of us had no choice at all, but to continue going to work.

Governor Cuomo: we want our children to access to the same opportunities and resources your children had. We want high quality schools for our kids.

Before the pandemic, the vast majority of us public school parents were working overtime to keep our families afloat. Many of us struggled to make ends meet; juggling work and parenting during normal circumstances is difficult enough. The first months of COVID-19 shattered that fragile arrangement. Many of our children are now in our care, 24/7. Those of us lucky to stay employed had to give up work shifts, cut back hours, or quit our jobs altogether to help our kids manage remote learning. Those of us not so lucky had to turn to our older children, family members and friends to help manage remote learning. For many of our families, having consistent and reliable internet access is challenging enough. Many of us had no device for online learning or had to manage one device for multiple school aged children.

We have hoped our kids would be able to go back to school at least for part of the week once more New Yorkers are vaccinated. Instead, through summer and fall, many school districts — already struggling under years of underfunding — were forced to slash their own budgets ahead of New York's planned 20 percent withholding of their annual funding. Those budget cuts meant layoffs for teachers, guidance counselors, nurses — the same staff that would be essential to pull off a safe blended-learning program. In Schenectady, over 300 teachers and other staff lost their jobs. In Albany, over 200 school district employees were laid off. And in Troy, nearly 70 school staff were furloughed. No surprise, then, when we got the email that many of our kids would have to switch to remote learning for the foreseeable future because their schools could not afford to staff in-class learning.

Those of us signing this letter span all walks of life: transplants and lifelong residents, large families and single parent households, nurses and grocery store clerks, Upstaters and Downstaters. What we all have in common is a desire to raise our children in New York — but your ongoing underfunding of public schools is making it nearly impossible.

We know that it does not have to be this way. New York's billionaires, millionaires, and giant corporations have only increased their combined net worth since the beginning of this crisis. You have the power to pass new taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers and fund our public school.

You keep worrying that the millionaires are going to leave. But if you do not raise taxes on those who can afford it, we — the working majority of this state — will be the ones forced out of our homes and communities. Do the right thing: raise taxes on the richest New Yorkers and help our kids get a quality education.

Signed,

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Alexis Miranda, New York City
Alina Larson, New York City
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Ashley Gantt, Rochester
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Veronica Morales, Bronx
Victor Jimenez, De Acuerdo
Wanda Smith, New York
Yenny Rivera, Bronx
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