

HON. EDWARD I. KOCH
HON. DAVID N. DINKINS
HON. RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI
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November 16, 2010

Hon. David Steiner
Commissioner of Education
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Commissioner Steiner:

We write with 24 years of experience as Mayors of the City of New York, and with a shared commitment to seeing our city and its schools thrive and succeed. It is with this experience and these values in mind that we urge you to approve Mayor Bloomberg's request for a waiver to enable Cathleen P. Black to serve as New York City Schools Chancellor.

There is no job other than Mayor that can truly prepare someone to serve as the City's chief executive; and there is no job other than Chancellor that can truly prepare someone for the responsibilities of running the nation's largest school system. Any past experience is necessarily incomplete. But at a turbulent time of severe budget cuts, maintaining organizational stability will be chief among the challenges facing the new Schools Chancellor, and it is clear that Ms. Black certainly has an extraordinary track record of managing large organizations through trying circumstances. We believe that Mayor Bloomberg's faith in Ms. Black's competence and her proven history as an outstanding executive is, in and of itself, reason enough to grant the necessary waiver.

But beyond Ms. Black's particular qualifications, it is important that you approve the Mayor's request for a waiver in order to maintain the clear line of accountability for the schools that today runs straight to City hall.

We know, first-hand, the importance of mayoral responsibility for the schools. Each of us was frustrated by the absence of accountability in the school system that resulted in political finger-pointing and, in turn, a kind of hopelessness about the prospect of positive change. Indeed, some of the most destabilizing and politically destructive fights of our terms came over the then-Board of Education's selection of Chancellors.

Today, City residents are invested in the success of the school system in a way they never were before. Central to this fundamental shift is the fact that the Mayor is now clearly accountable for the schools system, including having sole responsibility for the selection of the Schools Chancellor.

It is not surprising that there is opposition to the Mayor's selection. Controversy and dissent have always played a central role in the history of New York City schools. But for the first time in that history, the system is not paralyzed as a result – because, at the end of the day, the Mayor is accountable. Disrupting that accountability by overruling the Mayor's selection would represent a damaging return to the past with serious, precedential implications for the City and its schools.

We have not always agreed with how Mayor Bloomberg has run the schools, and we can understand critics of the system – but at the end of the day the buck must stop at the Mayor's desk. Preserving clear mayoral accountability is critical to the long-term success of the school system and Mayor Bloomberg has enormous faith in Ms. Black's ability to lead. Mayor Bloomberg has outlined her proven history as an effective executive able to manage large organizations and the complexities that accompany them. She will certainly need the advice and counsel of respected educators to provide insight not reflected in her professional experience, and we trust that she will seek that guidance as Chancellor.

We therefore hope you will respond quickly and positively to Mayor Bloomberg's waiver request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Koch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Hon. Edward I. Koch

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David N. Dinkins". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letters being capitalized.

Hon. David N. Dinkins

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rudolph W. Giuliani". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letters being capitalized.

Hon. Rudolph W. Giuliani