

**TO: Harlem School Board Members**

**FROM: Harlem Federation of Teachers/Harlem Federation of Support Staff**

**DATE: March 8, 2010**

The Harlem Federation of Teachers and the Harlem Federation of Support Staff **STRONGLY OPPOSE** any and all reductions to the numbers of paraeducators serving the students of the Harlem School District. Paraeducators play a **VITAL** role in the support of Harlem students and teachers, serving to provide additional resources and guidance for those students that deserve and need extra assistance and attention. The plan that the Harlem School District is proposing to adopt, with its significant reductions in the numbers of paraeducators working and assisting students and other staff, will only serve to **DRASTICALLY DECREASE** the quality and quantity of services provided to these students. In the end, the students will suffer as they will not be receiving the attention and assistance needed to succeed. The HFT and HFSS sincerely hope that the Harlem School Board would not support, under any circumstances, a staffing proposal that would clearly reduce and/or eliminate support services for Harlem students.

That being said, the Union feels there are some misleading “facts” and assumptions being presented to the Board in pushing this new instructional delivery system and recommendation:

- The underlying cost of professional development that “will be required to support the increased implementation of consulting teachers in the schools.” Whether it takes place during the school day or not, there will be an unknown cost to the District (qualified speakers, collaboration and or professional development time paid according to contractual rates, etc.) in pursuing this initiative.
- There is a presumption that paraeducators are not, or have not been, qualified to provide exceptional support services to students and certified teachers. Highly-qualified status for paraprofessionals was instituted several years ago as a way to ensure paraprofessionals as an effective educational resource.
- In addition to highly qualified status, paraeducators receive yearly and continuous professional development in their skills and qualifications in providing educational services to students and staff. Such an investment in time and monies will have been wasted by such a decision to reduce their numbers.
- Several Harlem paraeducators are already certified teachers as well, and this expertise and skill set will be lost with the decision to replace these individuals.
- There is a misleading assumption that 18 certified teachers can provide the same or better service than 65 paraeducators because of their degree/training. When an individual does the math and examines the impact of these 18 teachers replacing 65 paraeducators, there is a clear workload issue. The additional teachers will not be working with the same teacher/student ratios that are provided under the current structure. How effective will that be? And at what cost to the student(s)?

- There is still plenty of research that needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of this model, and the proposal even admits to the fact that the District will need to “work through the concerns and demonstrate how the refined model can provide more focused and specialized support to classroom teachers.” If this is true, wouldn’t such a sweeping and District-wide initiative be potentially destructive without first testing and studying any changes on a much smaller and controlled scale?
- Finally, the proposal makes the assumption that qualified Special Education teachers will be available for hire to implement such an initiative. This assumption is being made at a time when the District has been unable to fill existing Special Education vacancies with properly certified teachers this school year and for several past ones as well. But now the District can fill those existing vacancies plus the ones that will be created by this initiative?

Again, the Union sincerely hopes the Harlem School Board reconsiders the proposed resolution regarding the elimination of such a large number of paraeducators. The Union strongly opposes this proposal and hopes the Harlem School Board will do the same.