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March 10, 2011

Cathleen P. Black
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10001

Dear Chancellor Black:

I am writing you on behalf of the many school principals in both my borough, and throughout New York City to express our opposition to the Department of Education's plan to institute the Deferred Planning Program Initiative (DPPI), thus seizing 30 percent of our local schools' savings for FY 2012. The longstanding DPPI has allowed principals to roll over budget funds to the next year without penalty. Many of our school leaders have planned with their respective school leadership teams over the past three to four years to set aside "rainy day" funds to avoid layoffs of teachers and to preserve critically important after-school programs that service the needs of our respective communities during economically challenging times.

This plan sends the unintended message that fiscal responsibility is not rewarded. Principals must now decide by March 18 whether to "use it or lose it." They are, in effect, being encouraged to "go shopping." Thus, this policy discourages savings and will have a counterproductive effect on managing budgets.

Anything less than 100 percent of Rollover Funds during these very difficult fiscal times strikes me as inappropriate. How can we say that we are helping our principals "continue making prudent, long-term budget decisions" when we are giving them only 70 cents on the dollar of money that they worked so hard over several years, with their school communities, to save. In sum, they made short-term sacrifices for the long-term health of their schools and students.

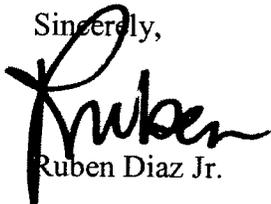
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This is simply a bad business decision, and it sends the wrong message to frugal and fiscally responsible principals throughout the City. Chancellor Black, you have the opportunity to do the right thing and give this money back to the schools where it rightfully belongs. It is clear from the numerous conversations I have had with principals that the Deferred Planning Program Initiative (DPPI) will have direct, deleterious implications on after-school programs and class sizes.

I urge you to reconsider undertaking the Deferred Planning Program Initiative by allowing principals to continue to roll over the full amount of their savings. Our young people depend on decisions such as these to help maintain educational equity.

I thank you in advance for your prompt action on this issue. I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,


Ruben Diaz Jr.