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August 12, 2020

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**Dr. Edwin M. Quezada**  
Superintendent of Schools

RE: Response to the August 7, 2020 Media Release from the Yonkers Federation of Teachers (YFT), CSEA 9169 and Yonkers Council of Administrators (YCA)  
*Union Officials Demand Critical Safety Protocols Be Adopted Before Yonkers Schools Reopen*

Dear Yonkers Public Schools Parents/Guardians, Friends in our Labor Sector and Members of the Community,

On August 7, 2020, a media release was disseminated by the leaders of three of the school district's bargaining units: Yonkers Federation of Teachers (YFT), CSEA 9169 and Yonkers Council of Administrators (YCA). It is incumbent upon the District to respond as to where we are aligned with their "demand" for a safe return to school in September as well as to point out the inaccuracies, misrepresentations and likely consequences of the actions described in their release.

Let me begin by thanking our union officials for thinking outside of the box during this complex time. Their apprehension and concerns are expected and understood. These concerns were anticipated and calculated in every action the District is implementing to reopen schools in September.

Let me remind not only our union officials, but our entire community that that no school district's plan for reopening schools can fully eliminate risk. A cautiously thought out plan that follows applicable local, state and federal guidelines can only mitigate risk. I am optimistic we will resolve union officials' fact-based concerns as well as address the questions from our parents/guardians to successfully reopen our schools for students and staff in September. In addition, I continue to ask our union leadership to join me and call on Albany and the Federal government to provide additional funding to support the extensive requirements we have identified in the [Yonkers Public Schools 2020-2021 School Reopening Plan](#) (The Plan)The Plan to safely open schools and address the concerns of our staff and families.

It is critically important to note that a healthy and safe return to school for our students, staff and families is the all-encompassing core of The Plan submitted to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and posted on the [District's website](#) on July 31, 2020. The Board of Education Trustees, myself and my executive team are in full agreement with our union officials on these essential requirements.

This mandate is reflected throughout The Plan. On page 2 in the first paragraph our message notes, "Throughout the spring and summer, we remained steadfast on designing a reopening plan that addresses the collective needs of Yonkers Public Schools stakeholders, always with our students at the core of every decision. This plan was developed using the recommendations and feedback we received from the 2020 Reopen Yonkers Public Schools Planning Committees comprised of parents, students, teachers, administrators and staff as well as numerous virtual parent/guardian meetings and surveys offered to teachers, students and parents/guardians. Our common goal is a safe, organized return to school for students, staff and families. Our priorities continue to be the health, safety and well-being of everyone, robust teaching and learning and equity. The success of this plan relies on our

strong partnerships within our community, the relentless commitment from every stakeholder and continuous communication.” It continues in the second paragraph stating, “As the status of the pandemic changes, we are prepared to modify student instruction in real time. In addition, the Plan will evolve through collective feedback from all stakeholders.” This mandate is also explicit on pages 4, 6, 7, 8 and in every Appendix of The Plan.

The inaccuracies in the media release are in the union officials claims that, “To date, district officials have engaged in virtually no coordination with labor leaders on its reopening plan,” as well as “Yonkers Public Schools officials refused to share their plan with any of the three unions representing district employees until after it was submitted to the State and posted on their website.”

Moreover, we are unequivocally committed to *continuing* our collaborative work with our entire learning community which formally began in May 2020 and continued through July 28, which allowed time for my team to incorporate these discussions and comply with the NYSED and DOH submission deadline of July 31, 2020. From mid-June through July there were 9 meetings with our union officials, 3 with the YFT, 4 with the CSEA and 2 with the YCA. In addition, on June 22, 2020 the three union presidents received copies of all of the feedback from the formal committee meetings noted in the next paragraph. Clearly, there was no refusal to share information. Given its scope, comprehensiveness and only 3 weeks from the time school districts received the NYSED and Department of Health guidelines and assurances to develop plans, The Plan was not finalized until the July 31 deadline. Therefore, it was not feasible to provide it beforehand.

In fact, as noted on page 10 of The Plan, “On May 12, 2020, Dr. Edwin Quezada, Superintendent of Schools, announced the creation of six stakeholder planning committees to collaboratively research, discuss, and construct the best approach to address concerns and implement strategies to reopen schools. The six committees [Academic, Operations, Emotional Support, Health and Safety, Special Populations and Communication] completed their research and work between May 18 and June 9, 2020.” Each committee included representation from every key stakeholder group. This highly inclusive approach included participants selected by the official organization/union representing those stakeholders: 7 Trustees, 18 Central Office administrators, 18 School/YCA administrators, 36 Teachers/YFT, 18 CSEA, 18 Parents/Yonkers Council of PTAs and 40 students. These committees met a total of 38.5 hours over 26 days. The feedback gathered was disseminated to each committee member. The Plan was developed with this feedback and was incorporated, as appropriate, into the Appendices that outline The Plan protocols.

To compile a comprehensive plan for reopening schools, as we did in Yonkers, falls equally across all stakeholder groups. The issues and concerns of parents and families, or those of unrepresented employees, are just as valid and compelling as the concerns of staff represented by unions. The six committees on reopening reflected the diverse interests of the totality of our stakeholders, and each perspective was given equivalent weight. It is not in the formulation of a reopening plan, but in its implementation, given its potential effect on terms and conditions of employment, that labor unions status must be recognized through impact bargaining. That status has and will continue to be duly recognized. Multiple meetings with our unions have already been scheduled.

The unions, “four-phase approach to reopening Yonkers’ school buildings,” offers some insightful recommendations and some insurmountable challenges. To be clear, I welcome further collaborative discussions around their approach. *Italicized* below is from the unions’ media release followed by my comments.

*Phase I: Bring back staff. Prepare classrooms to receive students and remote learning begins.* The District is in total agreement that all staff should be in their assigned school building on September 1. The Superintendent’s Conference Days are built into the school calendar for this purpose. As outlined in The Plan’s Hybrid and Online Remote Instruction models, staff in school buildings is essential. It ensures efficient and effective student instruction across content area subjects and coursework and the delivery of student services

including social-emotional and technology support. Having staff on-site facilitates professional development for mandatory training and ongoing support for teachers and staff.

*Phase II: Teachers students and families meet each other individually remotely to assess academic, emotional and technological needs.* To “individually” meet students and families may be desirable during these challenging times. Unfortunately, it is impractical and inequitable for our families without technology and/or connectivity or the resources to physically come to a school. As noted in The Plan, this outreach will be accomplished daily by school personnel. Hybrid Instruction, which is how we plan to begin on September 8, has Flex Day Wednesday built into the students and teachers weekly schedules to accommodate this work.

*Phase III: (One month later) Welcome students back into the buildings in a hybrid model.* According to the unions, they are suggesting phasing in in-person instruction by providing only Online Remote Instruction in September and Hybrid Instruction beginning in October. This approach would exacerbate the existing detrimental impact on our students resulting from the loss of three months without in-person instruction coupled with the adverse impact on their social-emotional growth and development. The enormous implications of this recommendation, include:

- As of this date, school districts have not received guidance from NYSED whether they would approve phasing in in-person instruction as suggested by the unions. At this point if we proceed with a phased process without the proper approval, it could impact the State’s required 180 days instructional days for students. Were the District to move ahead with the unions’ model without this approval, 18 instructional days would need to be made up by using the 17 non-federal holidays and adding 1 additional day in June. These make-up days would be the day after Thanksgiving, the day before Christmas, the December Holiday Recess, the Winter Recess, the Spring Recess, Good Friday and Eid-al-Fitr. This impact does not even account for any school closings that may be required by inclement weather.
- 10% reduction (\$21 million) in Foundation Aid which is based on 180 instructional days. This would most likely require additional staff lay-offs.
- Possible furloughing of dedicated hardworking school-based CSEA employees because children are not in school. This may include nurses, school safety officers, clericals, aides, bus monitors, food service workers, among others. Many of these employees reside in the City of Yonkers.

*Phase IV: Reassess/reevaluate to make adjustments, as needed.* This process is noted in The Plan’s Planning Timeline Phase 3 Plan Implementation, and in fact, this practice is universally integrated in all of the District’s work.

Once again, I want to reiterate my appreciation and respect for the work and commitment of the District’s approximately 3,700 employees. Through collaborative ongoing dialogue with our bargaining units, I remain optimistic that we will resolve our respective concerns. Our common goal is the successful reopening of our schools for students, staff and families and to begin student instruction on Tuesday, September 8, 2020.

Sincerely,



Dr. Edwin M. Quezada

C: President Rev. Steve Lopez, Vice President Ramos-Meier and Trustees of the Board of Education