



Statement  
by the  
Council of the Great City Schools  
On Educational Equity in New York City and Urban America

The ground-breaking jurist Thurgood Marshall once noted, “We deal here with the right of all of our children, whatever their race, to an equal start in life and to an equal opportunity to reach their full potential as citizens. Those children who have been denied that right in the past deserve better than to see fences thrown up to deny them that right in the future.”

These words have been the beacon for all those who have fought for civil rights, equity, and opportunity for America’s children since Marshall successfully argued his case before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 and before. They are also the guideposts for the nation’s Great City Schools, although we have further to go to realize Marshall’s vision. Our achievement gaps by race and language are too wide; our student placements and suspensions can be disparate; and our funding is often unequal. We see these inequities and are committed to addressing them.

As a national coalition of urban school leaders, we launched a Males of Color Task Force that we have now paired with a Females of Color Task Force. We joined with President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative and publicly pledged to take steps in 11 areas to enhance equity for our students. We measure our progress in these areas using a series of statistical indicators and the Nation’s Report Card. We published a *Call for Change*, outlining steps that all urban school systems could be taking to improve educational outcomes for our students of color. We have fought before the U.S. Supreme Court to protect the use of race to desegregate our schools. And we have taken many other steps. Are they enough? Not yet, but the leadership of the nation’s Great City Schools is determined to ensure our students can reach their full potential.

This same spirit of determination is fueling efforts in New York City by Mayor Bill de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza to correct longstanding inequities in the nation’s largest urban school system. The nation’s Great City Schools stand with the mayor and the chancellor in wanting to break down the fences that Marshall, a graduate of one of our schools, devoted his life to smashing. We applaud their courage and draw inspiration from their commitment.

These challenges exist in other cities as well and we are committed everywhere to helping bend the arc of history towards greater opportunity for all. This work is difficult--otherwise we would be further along. Clearly not everyone wants us to succeed and there are some who will exploit the divisions inherent in our efforts. But America’s Great City Schools stand on the side of equity and justice and we ask those who share our ideals to work with us to realize the vision that Marshall so clearly articulated.