*[ADDRESS]*

[ *DATE* ]

To:

Mayor Bloomberg

City Hall

New York, NY 10007

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor, NYC Department of Education

Tweed Courthouse

52 Chambers Street

New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Walcott:

We write to object to the new sibling policy in Gifted & Talented Programs. Calling the proposed policy a “sibling policy” is a misnomer. The proposed policy honors sibling preference in name only, and effectively eliminates sibling preference except in a very small number of circumstances.

Under the existing policy, qualifying siblings receive a preference in admission, enabling them to attend the same program or school with their older sibling. The purpose of this policy is to keep elementary school families together. Mayor Bloomberg advocated for protecting family unity in schools because he correctly recognized that families make educational decisions based on a host of practical considerations. Mayor Bloomberg recognized that the absence of sibling preference resulted in transportation and scheduling hardships for families.

We made our decision to accept a seat at a citywide G&T school for our older child in reliance on the sibling policy. We recognize that there is never a guarantee that a child will qualify for selective programs, but the existing sibling policy provided the certainty of family unity if our younger child DID qualify for admission to a citywide program. We would have made different decisions had we known that the DOE would unilaterally eliminate the sibling policy with no warning, no opportunity for families or the community to provide comments or feedback. The elimination of the sibling policy will result in families divided between multiple schools, possibly in different neighborhoods, stretched by the logistical and physical challenges of having children in multiple schools.

The DOE can remedy the unfairness of this new policy by grandfathering in existing families in the citywide G&T programs under the existing sibling policy. The proposed policy would apply to new families whose children are applying for entrace to G&T programs beginning in 2013-2014. The result would be to restore fairness and equity to families with minimal impact on the new sibling policy.

There is ample precedent for allowing siblings of families already in the system to be grandfathered into their older sibling's schools when admission rules change. A few years ago, District 3 zoned schools, which had previously allowed out-of-catchment students to attend, imposed new rules giving priority to students who lived in the zone but grandfathered in out-of-catchment siblings for existing families. Several schools in Park Slope (District 15) are being re-zoned but are also honoring family unity in the same way, by grandfathering in siblings of existing families.

The DOE has recognized the fairness of grandfathering in siblings for existing families when admission rules or priorities are changed. We urge the DOE to provide equity to families in the G&T system, allowing qualifying siblings to be grandfathered in under the existing sibling policy. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,

 PARENT NAME

 P.S. 334 / The Anderson School

Robert Jackson, City Councilmember and Chairman, City Council Committee on Education

Gale Brewer, City Councilmember, District 3

Jesse Mojica, Executive Director, NYC Department of Education, Division of Family and Community Engagement

Gentian Falstrom, NYC Department of Education, Director of Elementary School Admissions