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**Testimony of Grand Street Settlement
Regarding the Mayoral Control of City Schools
March 14, 2019**

My name is Robert Cordero, and I am the Executive Director of Grand St. Settlement, a historic settlement house that has been serving New Yorkers at all stages of life since 1916, and we are one of 40 members of United Neighborhood Houses. I'm also a former public school teacher and social worker. At Grand St. Settlement, we are experts at providing high-quality early childhood education programs—since the inception of the federal War on Poverty—to nearly 400 children at four sites on the Lower East Side and one in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Grand St. Settlement's 45 Pre-K teachers are the cream of the crop. They are highly qualified, expertly certified, hardworking, and care passionately about the success of our youngest students. Unfortunately, they are also some of our poorest compensated employees due to the current funding structure for the highly successful Universal Pre-K Program. Grand Street's teachers are represented by DC 1707 and we stand together in support of salary parity for teachers, regardless of the program's location at a community-based organization or public school.

We believe that Mayoral Control of the schools is a good thing, but this control must be accountable to all its workers. As the Department of Education unifies all Birth-to-Five and Universal Pre-K programs, **the salary disparity between teachers at community providers and their colleagues in public schools must be eliminated.** A truly unified early childhood education system is not possible until this salary disparity is fixed.

I speak as a settlement house executive director, and I am also a parent of twin boys who are in Universal Pre-K. If one of my sons is in a public school Universal Pre-K class, and the other is at a settlement house Universal Pre-K class two blocks away, why should Daniel's teacher make \$30,000 less annually than Lucas's teacher? And to amplify the disparity, teachers in community-based programs often offer longer school days in year round programs, meaning they work more for less pay.

Both educational settings offer the same curriculum with outstanding teachers. Yet this bureaucratic policy—a systemic failure—has created an inequitable salary apartheid.

The situation is only getting worse. Nonprofit providers consistently lose staff to higher pay at the Department of Education. We, community-based organizations, train new teachers only to lose them to the Department of Education for well-deserved higher wages.

There is another under-recognized and unacceptable facet of this salary disparity. The teachers at Grand St. Settlement, like most of our staff, are women of color who are from the communities they serve. At Grand Street, we strive to go beyond diversity to reach equity. Our definition of equity is “shared power.” There is an old saying that “money is power.” Therefore, money is equity, especially in this case.

I’m proud that in 2018, Grand St. Settlement was awarded the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York’s Nonprofit Excellence Award in the category of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We work to take a hard look at ourselves and how we can be a more equitable organization. Yet being unable to address this salary disparity means we, too, perpetuate inequities in the system.

Like many New Yorkers, I am frustrated when I see many complex inequities buried in the latency of a bureaucratic system. Where does one start in fixing these problems? But in this case, the economic disparity is so inequitable on its face, and the solution is plainly in front of us.

I urge Mayor de Blasio to uphold his bold commitment to early childhood education by championing the elimination of this disparity by funding nonprofit and public school programs at the same levels. We understand the problem. Let’s fix it.

Thank you for your time and attention, and happy St. Patrick’s Day from the Loisaída!

Robert Cordero
Executive Director