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May 30, 2018

Mr. William C. Thompson
Chairperson, Board of Trustees
Mr. James B. Milliken, Chancellor
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Dear Chairperson Thompson and Chancellor Milliken:

We write as elected department chairs from academic departments throughout CUNY. We commend you on reaching the landmark agreement with the PSC on reducing the contractual teaching load. Few changes have greater potential to enhance the ability of CUNY students to achieve their formidable aspirations, and few have greater potential to expand the intellectual life of the University through its academic departments.

But the potential of the agreement will not be fully realized if the University fails to allocate adequate funding and takes the position that current discretionary reassigned time allocated by the college presidents must be eliminated or sharply reduced. Such an approach will defeat the agreement's important purpose. We urge you in the strongest terms to fund and implement the new teaching load reduction agreement so that its full benefit for the University will be achieved. Even though the coming academic year is just the first in a three-year phasing-in of the reduction, the approach established in the first year may well set the pattern for the years ahead.

The CUNY administration publicly recognized the value of the agreement when it was announced on December 8, 2017. Chancellor Milliken reported that the contractual reduction would "strengthen the University's competitiveness in attracting and retaining talented faculty." University Provost (and incoming Interim Chancellor) Vita Rabinowitz cited "the additional time faculty will now spend meeting and advising students, as well as on their research and scholarship." The language of the agreement itself, which was signed by Chancellor Milliken, asserts that "the additional time resulting from the reduction in the undergraduate contact teaching hour workload . . . will be devoted to such activities as student and academic advisement, office hours, academic research" and other activities that promote student success.

There will be very little "additional time" and very little increase in the ability of the full-time faculty to do mentoring or research if the CUNY administration persists with the current plan for implementation. Under the current implementation plan, academic departments will largely be no more competitive in "attracting and retaining faculty." The potential of the agreement—and even the explicit terms of its language—will not be achieved unless the University administration rethinks its current limited approach to funding and implementation.

We understand that the teaching load agreement reduces the contractual obligation, and we recognize the value of that change. We are pleased that full-time faculty who have regularly taught the full teaching load, without access to any discretionary reassigned time, will immediately benefit from the change and will begin to have a more manageable teaching load. That is a significant gain for CUNY faculty and students.

But reassigned time at CUNY is not an add-on. It is essential to accomplishing the University's mission. College administrations have long relied on the allocation of discretionary reassigned time to achieve their college's priorities. Some colleges have carved out funds to support reassigned time for research-active faculty; others have used reassigned time to ensure that programs and initiatives are staffed, to support their educational priorities. The only way to ensure that the faculty as a whole experiences "additional time" for student mentoring, support and research is to maintain colleges' current reassigned time *in addition to* the contractual reduction.

We call on you to allocate the funding necessary to preserve all existing reassigned time in addition to implementing the contractual teaching load reduction. We also call on you to cover the instructional hours that will no longer be taught by existing full-time faculty by creating new full-time faculty positions. If the University covers these courses in the cheapest way—by hiring more adjuncts, who often receive no paid time to meet with students—the purpose of the reduction will be largely defeated.

Only a third of the total funding will be needed in the 2018-19 academic year, as it is the first year of a three-year phasing-in period. The CUNY administration failed to secure even this modest amount of additional dedicated funding in the most recent New York State budget. Yet University administrators have expressed satisfaction with the State budget result. CUNY management can find funding for many other priorities within the existing budget allocation. If creating "additional time" so that faculty can enable the University "to improve our students' success and outcomes" is a priority, then it should be a priority for funding.

The agreement on the teaching load represents years of discussion and negotiation. We ask you not to squander its value by failing to stand up for the benefits you yourselves identified on the day it was announced. Do not accept the premise that austerity is the best we can expect of CUNY. The teaching load agreement provides a rare chance to do something that would make a tremendous difference to CUNY students and the University's academic stature. We urge you not to miss that chance. As department chairs responsible for academic leadership among our faculty peers, we call on you to find the money—and the vision—to implement the agreement so that it fulfills its abundant potential.

Sincerely,

Molly Emma Aitken-Zaidi, Art, CCNY
Daisuke Akiba, Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Queens College
Gordon Alley-Young, Communications and Performing Arts, Kingsborough CC
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David Balk, Health and Nutrition Sciences, Brooklyn College
Nina Bannett, English, NYC Tech
Ara Basmajian, Mathematics, CUNY Graduate School
Ruth Bass, Art and Music, Bronx CC
Seth Baumrin, Communication and Theatre Arts, John Jay College
Bernard Beckerman, Health Professions, York College
Abderrazak Belkharraz Idrissi, Math, Engineering, and Computer Science, LaGuardia CC
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Vanessa Bing, Social Science, LaGuardia CC
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cc: Vita C. Rabinowitz, University Provost and (incoming) Interim Chancellor
PSC Membership