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**PARENTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN WIN PRELIMINARY
INJUNCTION IN DISCRIMINATION SUIT AGAINST NYC DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION**

*Court's Decision Allows School Serving Highest Number of Special Needs Children of Color to
Continue Preparations for 2017-2018 School Year*

NEW YORK (May 25, 2017) – Parents of special needs children today won a preliminary injunction in their discrimination suit against the New York City Department of Education. The ruling from the Manhattan Supreme Court will allow the middle school of Harlem's Opportunity Charter School (OCS) to continue planning for the 2017-2018 school year, despite attempts from the DOE to shut down the school based on rigid citywide metrics that failed to consider the unique population at OCS.

The parents argue that, since OCS enrolls more students with disabilities than any other public charter or traditional public school, the DOE's accountability system, based largely on annual test scores, has a discriminatory impact on OCS's students. Parents warned that closing the middle school would force students back to the public schools they had left to find a school that better suited their needs.

"Opportunity Charter School is committed to and disproportionately serves low-income and special needs children from communities of color across the city. When students come to us, they have been neglected and ignored in the public system and in most cases, have fallen behind. But through our comprehensive services and specialized staff, we're able to make a massive difference in their lives," said **OCS Founder and Head of School Leonard Goldberg**. "Instead of supporting our city's most vulnerable students, the Department of Education wants to shut down one of their only resources. We stand with our parents, students and alumni in fighting this decision so that we can continue to provide resources that help students thrive academically, emotionally and socially in all aspects of life."

"The reality is, New York public schools are not equipped to meet the individual needs of children with learning disabilities, a problem that is even worse in communities of color," said **OCS parent Layta Downs**. "In threatening to close down OCS's middle school and thrust students back into the public school system, the DOE is breaking up a school, compromising students' futures and disrupting entire families. We will use every tool we have to ensure that our children have a school where they feel comfortable to grow in a learning environment best suited to their needs."



“I can’t imagine getting the same education somewhere else, because I’ve grown more in the last two years at OCS than I did at any other school,” said **Ms. Downs’ son, Kanye Paulin, a seventh-grader at OCS.** “I don’t know where my family would be without the wonderful people at OCS who have welcomed me and helped me grow as a student from the very first day I got here. I really hope that I can continue on to 8th grade at OCS in the fall.”

More than 50 percent of OCS’s student population have moderate to severe learning disabilities and many suffer from a wide range of complex social and emotional challenges. The DOE’s decision comes at a time when the school’s high school has achieved its best results. In 2015, OCS’s high school produced its highest graduation rates ever, just one percentage point below the citywide rate of 71 percent. And this year OCS is projecting a high school graduation rate of 76% for June, and 85% for students on track to graduate in August, in spite of its diverse student body. Both will be OCS’s highest graduation rates to date. The DOE has granted a three-year renewal for OCS’s high school.

The school’s success is made even more critical because of the makeup of the student body. Nearly two-thirds of the school’s incoming sixth graders scored at the lowest level on state tests, while 54 percent of OCS students receive some form of special education. Despite these challenges, OCS’s middle school students experienced important academic growth. From 2013-14 to 2015-16, students’ average ELA exam scores increased in each school year.

Since its founding, OCS has provided a comprehensive set of clinical programs and services administered by a team of learning specialists, counselors, and social workers designed to meet the needs of its students. OCS serves an economically disadvantaged population, with nearly nine in ten OCS students eligible for meal assistance and a student population that is 98 percent either black or Hispanic. The school has partnered with The Children’s Aid Society Carrera Program for nearly a decade. The waitlist for prospective students currently stands at 5,137 children.

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About Opportunity Charter School: Our mission is to provide youth who struggle in traditional learning environments, including students with disabilities, with the tools needed to excel academically, emotionally and socially in all aspects of life. For more information visit www.ocsny.org.