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Contact: Jennifer Barden, Jennifer@risaheller.com, (646) 676-4486

**PARENTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN WIN TEMPORARY
RESTRAINING ORDER IN DISCRIMINATION SUIT AGAINST NYC
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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

NEW YORK (April 24, 2017) – Parents of special needs children today won a temporary restraining order 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 move forward with a lottery 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.

OCS is one of the only charter schools in the city that serves students of color with learning disabilities. Parents and the school filed a lawsuit last week alleging the DOE is discriminating against disabled children by refusing to renew the school's charter. 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 a special place uniquely equipped to uplift some of our city's most vulnerable children. The response from our community of students, parents, teachers, and alumni over the past several months has been overwhelming and impossible to ignore," said **OCS Founder and Head of School Leonard Goldberg**. "Today's decision will allow us to continue to serve 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."

"As a parent of two sons who have benefitted from an educational experience at OCS that we could not find anywhere else, I am grateful that the court has intervened to protect these students," said **OCS parent Layta Downs**. "We will take this fight as far as we can to ensure that our children have a school where they feel comfortable and 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 the school projects to increase on that mark by 12 percent. 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 4,035 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.