§ 211-c. Distinguished educators. The regents shall establish a distinguished educator program that recognizes educational leaders who have agreed to assist in improving the performance of low performing school districts.

1. Building principals, superintendents of schools and teachers including retirees and current employees of school districts, under whose leadership schools have demonstrated consistent growth in academic performance and other individuals who have demonstrated educational expertise, including superior performance in the classroom, shall be eligible for designation by the regents as distinguished educators. Provided, however, individuals employed by for-profit entities shall not be eligible for such recognition.

2. From the pool of distinguished educators designated by the regents pursuant to subdivision one of this section, the commissioner shall appoint distinguished educators who have expressed their willingness to assist low performing districts in improving their academic performance. To the extent practicable, the commissioner shall appoint distinguished educators to assist districts with comparable demographics to the schools or districts that are or were under such educator's leadership.

3. The commissioner may appoint a distinguished educator to a school district;

a. when such district or a school within such district has failed to achieve adequate yearly progress for four or more years;

b. as a member of a joint school intervention team pursuant to paragraph b of subdivision two of section two hundred eleven-b of this part.

4. The school district to which a distinguished educator is appointed shall cooperate fully with an appointed distinguished educator.

5. An appointed distinguished educator shall assess the learning environment of schools in the district, review or provide assistance in

the development and implementation of any district improvement plan and/or any corrective action, restructuring, or comprehensive plan of any school within the district to which the distinguished educator is assigned. Such distinguished educator shall either endorse without change or make recommendations for modifications to any such plan to the board of education, trustees, or chancellor, in a school district in a city of one million or more inhabitants, and the commissioner. Upon receipt of any recommendations for modification, the board of education, trustees, or chancellor shall either modify the plans accordingly or provide a written explanation to the commissioner of its reasons for not adopting such recommendations. The commissioner shall direct the district to modify the plans as recommended by the distinguished educator unless the commissioner finds that the written explanation provided by the district has compelling merit.

6. Appointed distinguished educators shall be deemed ex-officio, non-voting members of the board of education or trustees. In a school district in a city of one million or more inhabitants, any such distinguished educator shall be deemed an ex-officio, non-voting member of the community district education council or the city board, as applicable.

7. The reasonable and necessary expenses incurred by the appointed distinguished educators while performing their official duties shall be paid by the school district.

8. If an appointed distinguished educator is employed by a school district or charter school, it shall be the duty of the board of education or trustees of such school district, the chancellor of a city school district in a city of one million or more inhabitants, or the board of trustees of such charter school to facilitate the efforts of any such appointed distinguished educators in their employ by granting reasonable leave requests and otherwise accommodating their efforts, to the extent such efforts do not substantially interfere with the educator's performance of his or her regular duties.