Testimony of New York City Schools Chancellor Kamar H. Samuels:
FY27 Preliminary Budget Before the NYC Council on Education
March 23, 2026

Introduction

Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to testify on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. Thank you Speaker Menin; Education Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Committee on Education; and Early Childhood Education Chair Gutiérrez and Members of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education. I am New York City Public Schools Chancellor Kamar H. Samuels, and I am joined by First Deputy Chancellor Danielle Giunta; Deputy Chancellor of Family Partnership and Community Support Flavia Puello-Perdomo; Deputy Chancellor of Early Childhood Simone Hawkins; Deputy Chancellor of Inclusive and Accessible Learning Christina Foti; Deputy Chancellor of School Operations Kevin Moran; and Chief Financial Officer Seritta Scott. I am honored to serve in the Mamdani Administration and to lead the nation's largest school district. I look forward to discussing the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget as it relates to our city's students, staff, and families.

Vision and Priorities

For me, serving in this role is the culmination of more than 20 years devoted to our schools. I started as a New York City Teaching Fellow in the Bronx, where I realized that education would become my life's work, and later served as a principal, deputy superintendent, and superintendent. I am also a proud NYCPS parent.

These experiences have shaped my perspective profoundly—but as I refine my vision for our schools, the greatest influences have been the conversations I've had with our NYCPS community since taking this role. I've been to every borough, and soon, every superintendency, visiting our schools—by this point, 36 and counting. I've seen NYC Reads and Solves in action and students' artistic and creative talents on full display. I've watched our youngest learners develop their literacy skills and our oldest learners prepare for college and careers—whether that's by building robots or checking someone's vital signs, using aircraft simulators or broadcasting a news program. On each of these school visits, I've met with families, elected officials, staff, and community members, listening to their concerns, their ideas, and their hopes. I'm also more than halfway through a 10-stop community conversations tour, where I've gathered insightful feedback and a wide range of perspectives from students, families, staff, and community members across every borough. Tonight, that tour continues in Manhattan; tomorrow evening, we'll be in Brooklyn. And finally, earlier this month, I announced a comprehensive reorganization for NYCPS, one that puts students, families, and schools at the center of our work. My new cabinet, an experienced and diverse group of public servants, is here with me today.

Together, these conversations and perspectives have informed my vision for our school system, that every school should be safe, academically rigorous, and truly integrated. And as I have

demonstrated in my initial months as Chancellor, this work can only be done by listening to and partnering with families and communities.

My first priority is safety. We know that students cannot learn if they do not feel physically and emotionally safe, so we are taking a comprehensive approach to student well-being. With our cell phone policy, we are prioritizing students' mental health and creating distraction-free classrooms—and our work to leverage technology responsibly continues with our foundational AI guidance, which will be released tomorrow and will include opportunities for community input. With our Summer Rising program, we are keeping our students safe, engaged, and learning year-round; we recently launched applications and are gearing up for a fantastic summer. And with Project Open Arms, we are embracing and supporting our immigrant students and their families, reaffirming our commitment to every child's right to an education. Moving forward, I am committed to these strategies and others—such as community schools, support for students in temporary housing and foster care, and more—to ensure holistic student safety.

My second priority is academic rigor. Across every classroom, students should be challenged, engaged, and pushed to reach their fullest potential, all with appropriate support and guidance. That's where our core academic initiatives—NYC Reads, NYC Solves, and Student Pathways—come into play. This work is already transforming our system and producing real outcomes for students, and I am determined to deepen and strengthen this work as Chancellor. With NYC Reads, we are implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, or MTSS, to determine the highest-leverage interventions for each child. With NYC Solves, we are maintaining our focus on conceptual understanding while also promoting automaticity in foundational math skills. And with Student Pathways, we are aligning our work to New York State's Portrait of a Graduate, to ensure students gain the competencies that will not only earn them a diploma but will also serve them well in college, career, and life. This includes an emphasis on financial literacy, starting in kindergarten with our partners at NYC Kids Rise and continuing through high school. Academic rigor, I should note, is not only the purview of K-12. This administration has taken significant steps toward universal early care and education, including 2-K and 3-K expansion, while simultaneously stabilizing the system—because we are committed to engaging, enriching educational experiences from the earliest ages.

My third priority, true integration, is especially relevant to our NYC context, because our schools should reflect the rich diversity and multiculturalism of the city we call home. This is about expanding robust, rigorous programs—many of which intentionally foster diversity in every sense of the word—from bilingual education to specialized programs for students with disabilities, from International Baccalaureate programs to Early College high schools. It's about thoughtful enrollment policies and school utilization, especially as we meet the class size mandate. And it's about interdisciplinary, culturally responsive learning experiences, leveraging materials like our Civics for All and Respect for All programs. Let me be clear: "Respect for All" is more than a slogan. It's something we live every day in NYCPS. Our students deserve to see their stories recognized and uplifted—and to celebrate the identities of others.

To that end, I am proud to announce that, building on this Council's investment in creating culturally responsive resources such as the Black Studies Curriculum, the Latine Studies Curriculum, and Hidden Voices, we will be launching a comprehensive professional learning

plan to expand the use of these materials in classrooms across the city. While all our schools have *access* to these resources, access is not synonymous with implementation. I am committed to supporting our educators to make that implementation seamless and impactful.

I want to thank the many members whose support has been instrumental in bringing culturally responsive education to our schools—and I ask for your continued partnership. This is only the first step in my broader integration vision, and I'm excited to share more about how we are fostering equity and true integration, district by district, in the coming months.

FY2027 Preliminary Budget

So as you can see, we have hit the ground running, and the FY2027 Preliminary Budget will enable us to accelerate this progress. I am deeply grateful to the Mamdani Administration for their support of our students, schools, and families. This budget dedicates over $1B in new funding to our school system this fiscal year, a sum that will grow in the outyears, demonstrating that this administration "gets it"—the Mayor and his team are listening to and recognizing our needs, stabilizing the system and creating efficient, effective, and sustainable pathways to long-term transformation.

To start, this budget addresses operational necessities around technology, transportation, and more, laying a critical foundation for the rest of our work. The budget then builds on this foundation to advance the broader vision, making significant strides toward safe, academically rigorous, and truly integrated schools. With $106M in baselined funding for Summer Rising, we will keep our children engaged and safe year-round. With investments that support early childhood ($300M this fiscal year and even more baselined) and students with disabilities ($226M baselined), academic rigor will start early and the bar will remain high for *all* our students. Also meaningful is the baselined investment in reducing class sizes, allowing us to hire more teachers; in addition to this, we are closely collaborating with the School Construction Authority, unions, and elected officials to analyze our physical footprint, brainstorming capital and operational strategies to meet the mandate.

To our City Council members: I want to thank you for your ongoing support, partnership, and dedication to our school communities in all these areas—and many others. I also ask for your advocacy with State lawmakers as they pursue their own budget negotiations. We strongly support both houses' additions of Foundation Aid weights for students in temporary housing and foster care and increased weights for English Language Learners, which I spoke to at the State budget hearing in January. These updates are long overdue and will allow us to better support the needs of some of our most vulnerable learners. Moreover, both houses are proposing increased early childhood education investments, and the Assembly is proposing class size funding—all critical needs. At the same time, we hope the State will consider a regional cost index increase in the Foundation Aid formula and increased weights for students with disabilities.

Additionally, as the State considers an extension of mayoral control, I ask for your help in making clear to State lawmakers the importance of this governance structure. As I testified to City Council last month, mayoral control allows us to pursue big, bold systemwide goals, to ensure equity across our system, and to respond effectively in moments of crisis. Both the Mayor

and I believe that mayoral control and family empowerment can, and must, coexist. Our children deserve both—the centralized oversight and execution that allow for real, impactful change and the local input and decision-making that give our families a meaningful say. A thoughtful balance of the two will lift our system to new heights.

Conclusion

To close, I want to thank this Council for your continued partnership and dedication. It's been a pleasure meeting you and seeing you in our schools these last few months, and I know we will continue to partner in service of our school communities. I look forward to answering your questions.

JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND FINANCE
MARCH 23, 2026

Good morning,

I am Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairs Dinowitz and Lee, and the members of the committees for holding this hearing today.

New York City is currently failing many of its students with disabilities. Thousands of students with disabilities ended the 2024-2025 school year without receiving their legally mandated special education services, including speech, occupational, and physical therapy.[1] The city is required to provide these services, and even a short gap in services has a significant impact on the students who need them. Despite the fact that providing these services is not optional, the city has historically not properly included funding in the budget for service delivery. DOE must prioritize hiring service providers and adding service slots so providers can see more students during the school day. Additionally, the city should increase reimbursement rates for related service authorization vouchers, which allow families to obtain services privately when DOE is unable to provide services in-house. To address these shortfalls, the city should invest at least $100 million, plus whatever additional funding is necessary, to ensure that all students are receiving their mandated special education services.

Public schools are the main youth mental health system in our city, and yet, public schools are critically understaffed with mental health professionals, and many schools do not meet national recommended staff-to-student ratios.[2] School-based mental health clinics provide a range of on-site mental health services to students during the school day, and most of their current funding comes from Medicaid, which is insufficient to cover the range of supports and services that students and school communities need.[3] A report by then-Comptroller Brad Lander published at the end of last year stated that, to meet national standards for mental health staffing levels in schools, the DOE would need to hire 2,137 additional social workers and 1,220 guidance

[1] https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2027/
[2] https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/classrooms-counselors-clinics/
[3] https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

counselors, costing approximately $402–$426 million annually. The report also found that DOE's mental health spending data is so limited and fragmented, that it is nearly impossible to determine how much the city actually invests in school-based support with funding buried within broad budget lines and overlapping streams. This makes clear and transparent baseline funding for school-based health centers and other mental health services provided by schools critical, and I have faith that this administration will be more committed to transparency and accountability than the prior administration. Additionally, the Mental Health Continuum requires a renewal of $5 million in the FY27 budget. This continuum is a cross-agency partnership between the DOE, DOHMH, and H+H to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare.

In 2025, there were about 3,600 School Safety Agents employed by the city. Police presence and police infrastructure in schools is one way for schools to address their safety concerns, but one that has its roots in times of racial tension. Using police as a safety tool is also reactionary, often addressing violent or disruptive incidents after they happen, and focuses on punishment, discipline, and even arrest as consequences. Restorative justice, however, provides an avenue for students to be held accountable, while also learning how to resolve conflict, build relationships, and take responsibility for their actions—all without losing classroom time. The FY26 budget included $12 million in increased city funding to replace expired federal stimulus dollars. However, only half of this funding was baselined in the budget, with the rest funded for only one year. The city should baseline the full $12 million to ensure that schools can continue to expand their restorative justice programming.

In August of 2023, Advocates for Children found that only 31.1 percent of NYC schools are fully accessible for people with disabilities.[4] The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments ensure people with disabilities have equal access to public programs and services, including public education. However, many students with disabilities are barred from attending their neighborhood schools because of inaccessible infrastructure. This not only means that these students are unable to fully access their communities, but that they must travel to an accessible school, which may mean hours on a bus every day, cutting into their learning time. This lack of accessibility also means that students' family and community members with accessibility needs are unable to attend events and meetings at these schools. Though the DOE and School Construction Authority have made progress in increasing accessibility, we must prioritize funding for accessibility; the DOE estimated that it would take $1 billion in each of the next four five-year plans in order to maximize accessibility by 2045.[5] The 2025–2029 Capital Plan presently allocates $800 million for accessibility upgrades, which is an insufficient amount.The city should invest an additional $450 million in the Capital Plan to make 45 percent of schools accessible by 2030.

---

[4] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0cd31f41c8224f68a91b913b733bf46d
[5] https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2027/

Thank you.

Education
Healthcare
Public Services

AFT, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
AFT Nurses and Health Professionals
AFT Retirees

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202 879 4400
www.aft.org

Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENTS
J. Philippe Abraham
Frederick B. Albert
Jackie Anderson
LeRoy Barr
Victor M. Bonilla Sánchez
Vicky Rae Byrd
Monica Byron
Zeph Capo
Larry J. Carter, Jr.
Kathy A. Chavez
Jaime Cifione
Melissa Cropper
Amanda Curtis
James C. Davis
Stacy Davis Gates
Glenfya Dunham
Christian L. Fern
Francis J. Flynn
Jeffery M. Freitas
Ron Gross
Anthony M. Harmon
Karla Hernández Mats
Jan Hochadel
David Keepnews, RN
Frederick E. Kowal
Terrence Martin, Sr.
Kara McCormick-Lyons
Daniel J. Montgomery
Michael Mulgrew
Cecily A. Myart-Cruz
Shari Obrenski
Melinda Person
Juan Ramirez
Andrew Spar
Wayne Spence
Arthur G. Steinberg
Jessica J. Tang
Adam Urbanski
Debbie White, RN
Carl Williams
Lakia Wilson-Lumpkins
Sarah Wolford
Todd Wolfson

March 20, 2026

Speaker Julie Menin
New York City Council
444 E. 75th St., Unit 1B
New York, NY 10021

Dear Speaker Menin:

I write on behalf of the AFT, which represents more than 1.8 million professionals in education, healthcare and public services, including the more than 370,000 members who make up the AFT's Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) division. I write in strong support of "RESPECT check" legislation. I also write as the former president of the United Federation of Teachers who knows the vital importance paraprofessionals play in the lives of New York City children.

Every day, we fight for our paraprofessionals and school-related personnel who are not paid enough; they work under tough conditions, and many are subject to violence during the workday. Too many must work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Given the crucial role that paraprofessionals play in classrooms and the invaluable support they provide to the students they serve, securing commensurate compensation and respect is our priority.

This important legislation would provide the 26,000 paraprofessionals represented by the UFT with a much-needed pay increase of $10,000 to their annual salary. UFT paraprofessionals have a long history of fighting to be treated as professionals. They deserve a living wage.

We are facing paraprofessional shortages in NYC and throughout the nation. More responsibilities are being placed on paraprofessionals, and their work environment continues to get harder to navigate. Students are coming to school with fewer supports, and it's our paras who provide these students with stability, safety and important academic help.

The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

And federal law envisions and requires paraprofessionals to play many essential roles for our students, particularly our students with special needs. All too often recruitment issues become federal accountability issues.

Much has been said in this debate about pattern bargaining. I bargained many NYC contracts in my former capacities as UFT president and Municipal Labor Committee chair. Pattern bargaining was never intended to thwart vital city recruitment and retention efforts. EIT, Excellence in Teaching, is one example of a state program that lifted teacher salaries in the 1990s. It must not be used as a barrier to address a vital affordability and recruitment issue. Paras cannot afford to live where they work, and it is deeply affecting recruitment and retention.

Teachers and principals cannot do their jobs without paraprofessionals. Students need paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals need this respect legislation. We urgently need to make this legislation a reality.

Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten
President

RW:lb opeiu#2 afl-cio

cc: New York City Council Members

Testimony of Michael Mulgrew, UFT president, submitted before the New York City Council Committee on Education

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the union's 210,000 members, I would like to thank Education Chair Eric Dinowitz and all the members of the City Council's Committee on Education for holding today's public hearing on the New York City preliminary budget for fiscal year 2027. I would also like to thank Speaker Julie Menin for her strong leadership these past few months.

RESPECT for Paraprofessionals

Respecting, recruiting and retaining paraprofessionals in New York City is paramount. Paraprofessionals are the backbone of our public schools. Yet the city cannot hire or retain them due to the unfair practice of pattern bargaining — applying the same percentage-based wage increase to all municipal titles, regardless of salary. Due to the city's overreliance on this practice, paraprofessionals now make just below $33,000 per year. Despite the UFT's best efforts to increase their salaries, many paraprofessionals cannot afford to live in the city they serve, creating the need for Int. 0692-2026, which would provide an annual $10,000 to full-time paraprofessionals and a pro-rated amount to substitute paraprofessionals.

To be clear, the city's adherence to pattern bargaining is entirely voluntary. There is no law that requires the city to give all titles the same raise. In fact, the city has deviated from this pattern in extreme circumstances, such as the nursing shortage of the 1980s, when it gave city nurses above-pattern raises to ensure city hospitals were properly staffed. We are facing a similar moment of crisis today with our paraprofessionals. There are thousands of paraprofessional vacancies throughout the five boroughs, and each vacancy represents one or more students who are not receiving their legally mandated special education services. This cannot continue.

Not only is it a moral failure to leave our most vulnerable students without the services they need, but it is also costing the city billions. Next year, the city is on track to spend $1.5 billion on Carter cases from parents seeking money to send their child to private special education programs because the public schools couldn't meet their child's needs. It's time to pass Int. 0692-2026 and pay paraprofessionals directly, instead of paying for their absence.

Class Size

The UFT commends Mayor Mamdani for fully funding class size reduction in the preliminary budget for fiscal year 2027. As we enter the final phases of class size

reduction, we know we will need to build new seats to ensure the remaining 20 percent of schools comply with the law. We hope to work with this new administration to do what has not been done up until now: determine where the new seats are needed and develop a clear, accurate, funded plan to get them built. To accomplish this, the administration will need to be direct with the School Construction Authority that its posture of hoping the law's requirements will somehow vanish is no longer acceptable. Additionally, various dioceses throughout the city have announced the closures of schools in the next two years. There must be conversations about how we can utilize these school buildings to help us reach full compliance.

Child Care

All New York City families deserve affordable, safe care for their children. However, child care has become increasingly expensive and difficult to find. In response to this, the UFT created NYC Childcare Navigator to connect our members to affordable child care. Based on the overwhelming positive feedback from our members, we decided to expand our reach, and we are proud to now offer this valuable resource to all residents of the five boroughs. We ask that the City Council embrace the NYC Childcare Navigator as a frontline tool for families and providers to navigate eligibility and placement for existing and new child care capacity.

Additionally, the UFT applauds Mayor Mamdani and Gov. Hochul's investment in universal child care. We will need to grow and support our early childhood education workforce in order to make 3-K truly universal and rollout 2-K. To do this, the city must pay providers in a timely manner without delays, so they are not forced to provide services without income. The city must also include independent, non-network affiliated and home-based providers in this child care expansion. The UFT currently represents 8,000 home-based child care providers, who make it possible to offer families care in their very own neighborhoods. They also provide culturally responsive care and nontraditional hours of care, which is crucial for parents who work hours other than 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Finally, as we scale up our universal child care services, we must ensure that our youngest learners receive the appropriate special education services.

Fund UFT Programs

For years the UFT's programs have ensured that education funding goes directly into the classroom and improves educational outcomes for students and working conditions for teachers. This year we submitted discretionary-funding applications for six programs that we ask the City Council to support. We greatly appreciate the Council's past support for these programs and have seen a dramatic increase in demand for each of them in recent years. Because of that, we are requesting a proportionate adjustment in allocations to support these activities.

UFT Teacher Center

The UFT Teacher Center promotes teacher excellence and academic achievement for all students through professional development tailored to each school's unique needs. Last school year, Teacher Centers delivered over 126,000 hours of transformative professional development to over 341,000 educators, principals and parents. Additionally, 99% of participating educators reported that the Teacher Center's professional learning sessions improved their practice.

Thanks to the support we received from the City Council and the City Council Speaker's Initiative in 2025-26, we were able to open 11 new Teacher Centers, for a total of 197 sites — a 60% increase from 2020-21. The funding also enabled our 203 site coaches, who are embedded in schools across the city, to provide support in three critical areas:

1) Ensuring that educators are prepared to support students in literacy development using the science of reading and the new curricula used in the NYC Reads/Reading for All initiative.

2) Ensuring that educators are prepared to provide the social and emotional support their students need to address the trauma they have experienced in these unprecedented times, including students who are new arrivals to our city.

3) Ensuring that all students receive support equitably through providing professional learning that prepares educators to reach all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

Additionally, the UFT Teacher Center is committed to expanding our work with the Provider Professional Education Program and United Network for Early Childhood Education, which aim to grow the early childhood workforce for both teachers and home-based child care providers alike. This work is particularly important right now as we work to expand universal 3-K and create the 2-K program in New York City.

For 2026–27, we are requesting a grant of $6.5 million from the City Council Speaker's Initiative and $4.12 million from the City Council's discretionary funds to sustain and expand Teacher Center programming. This funding will allow us to retain and bring on additional central team staff who work with multiple schools, open new Teacher Centers in areas without any sites and continue to offer Teacher Center supports to schools across the city.

United Community Schools (UCS)

United Community Schools is a teacher-inspired and educator-led nonprofit with proven results that serves close to 20,000 families. Within each school there is a community school director who leverages outside relationships to bring the necessary resources directly to students and families. Our community schools provide food for families and offer mental health, physical health, dental and vision services within school buildings. In 2025 support from the City Council helped UCS schools feed over 71,000 families and provide over 48,000 health and wellness exams, screenings and check-ins.

As a result of these robust supports, we see test scores go up, attendance improve and student engagement increase at our UCS schools. We found that 46.3% of UCS students met ELA standards compared to 36.2% of the comparison group, showcasing a 10.2 percentage point advantage for middle and elementary school students. We also saw that high school students at UCS schools accumulated roughly one more credit than similarly situated non-community school students. Teachers too feel the impact of working in a UCS school, and we often hear our UCS teachers say they feel more supported, secure and engaged in their work.

This year we ask that the City Council provide UCS with $5 million to sustain our 32 community schools and expand the services we offer to communities. This funding will be used to build a dedicated UCS mental health team that will work in close collaboration with school principals, administrators and health practitioners to deliver coordinated, high-quality mental health and wellness services. It will allow six community school directors and three community school associates to oversee academic enrichment programs, attendance improvement activities, STEM/STEAM courses, family engagement workshops, community forums, vision and dental clinics and coat and toy drives at each of their school sites. Funding from the City Council will also enable us to provide UCS educators and staff with targeted technical assistance and instructional support to ensure they are well equipped to meet students' needs.

Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC) and Member Assistance Program (MAP)

The PLC program is one of our most effective tools for bringing equity to New York City public schools. This model weaves together social-emotional supports, restorative practices, culturally responsive pedagogy, mindfulness and healing-centered practices to support school communities and ensure every child has the social, emotional and academic skills needed to succeed in the classroom and life.

Recently, the PLC has collaborated with the MAP program to further expand the UFT's capacity to meet the needs of educators and school communities around social emotional support, mental health support and professional development opportunities. Our MAP careline has received over 30,000 calls since 2022, with a recent increase in calls relating to bias and hate crimes, as well as immigration crackdowns and fear of deportation of our students. Since the fall, MAP has also served over 300 schools that have requested crisis counseling from our team of trained clinicians because their school community has been impacted by suicide, grief and immigration fear (especially around ICE) that affected the school community.

Since 2019, MAP has also offered the Let's Talk About It all-day program to thousands of middle school students from around the NYC area, with a focus on the Bronx in the 2023–24 school year and Queens in the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years. Since 2018, MAP has also offered thousands of hours of professional learning opportunities and credits to educators and counselors.

To sustain and continue to expand all this programming, the UFT is requesting $1.9 million for the 2026–27 school year from the City Council.

Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence (PROSE)

PROSE amplifies the voices of educators by enabling them to propose school-level innovations that bolster student excellence. These innovations may include how teachers are hired and evaluated and how students are programmed throughout the day. Many of the over 280 PROSE schools that currently exist have a strong emphasis on project-based learning. The program includes most of the consortium high schools in the city, which have a state waiver allowing them to replace state Regents exams with project-based assessments, as well as other schools that focus on this kind of curriculum and assessment. PROSE also includes most of the Internationals Network of high schools, which are focused on serving students who are new arrivals to our city. We propose to use $300,000 in City Council funds to support schools in continuing these efforts, to expand the program to more school communities around the city, and to facilitate the sharing of best practices between schools around these innovations in the 2026–27 school year.

BRAVE Hotline

Bullying continues to pose a significant challenge in our schools, deeply affecting students' mental health, academic potential and overall well-being. That is why the UFT created BRAVE (Building Respect, Acceptance and Voice through Education), which raises awareness about bullying prevention, digital safety, conflict resolution and restorative practices through interactive workshops, school-based presentations and community outreach. We also have a BRAVE hotline that students, their families and educators can call, chat or text for help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As our schools face evolving challenges, such as the rise of cyberbullying and the increasing diversity of student needs, it is imperative that BRAVE continues to adapt and expand its critical services. We are requesting a grant of $300,000 from the City Council this fiscal year to fund program coordination, consultant-led workshops, outreach materials and community engagement efforts. This support will ensure that BRAVE can expand its reach, maintain high-quality programming, and continue serving schools and families with timely, relevant and impactful anti-bullying education.

Dial-A-Teacher

Dial-A-Teacher operates Mondays through Thursdays from 4 to 7 p.m., offering free homework help to students and parents in nine languages, including Spanish, Mandarin and Bengali. Last year, the program received over 35,000 calls. Dial-A-Teacher is respectfully requesting $325,000 in City Council funding for fiscal year 2027 to allow us to expand access to these supports by increasing the number of teachers available to answer calls, continuing with technological upgrades and providing staff development that will enhance our ability to serve students in the modern educational arena.

Support Citywide Initiatives

I would also like to advocate for citywide programs that are vital for our students and educators. We need to continue to baseline Teacher's Choice, and I also ask the Council to support arts in education and Commonpoint.

1. **Teacher's Choice** – Thank you for your continued support of the Teacher's Choice program. It is a key initiative to ensure teachers and other school staff are reimbursed for the school supplies and materials they purchase for their classrooms and for many of their students in need. We ask that you continue to provide $20 million in baseline funding for Teacher's Choice in fiscal year 2027.
2. **Arts in Education** – The arts introduce our students to new ways of thinking and expressing themselves. That is why we ask that the City Council support Broadway Bridges, the Broadway League program that provides $10 tickets for 10th grade students to see Broadway shows, aiming for every student to attend a show before graduation. This program also celebrates educators by hosting special events for them to experience the theatre. We also ask the Council increases funding for arts education in city schools and cultural centers such as museums and music halls.
3. **Commonpoint** – Commonpoint is a social services organization that supports the diverse needs of New Yorkers of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. The organization offers a variety of supports for youths and families, ranging from sports programs and summer camps to job training and college access assistance. We ask that you support Commonpoint's programs in the fiscal year 2027 budget.

Thank you for holding today's hearing and for working with us to support and fully fund public education in New York City. I look forward to our continued collaboration.

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

February 15, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

RE: City Council Support for the UFT Teacher Center (UFTTC) and Provider Professional Education Programs (PPEP/UNECE)

For more than 45 years, the UFT Teacher Center (UFTTC) has served as a cornerstone of New York City's school-based professional learning, supporting educators in all five boroughs through a deep partnership among the United Federation of Teachers, the New York State Education Department, and the New York City Department of Education.

Today, UFTTC operates in 197 Teacher Center sites, where school-based professional educators provide ongoing, embedded professional learning tailored to meet each school community's specific needs.

Supports include:
- Modeling instructional practices aligned to the P–12 New York State Learning Standards
- Mentoring new teachers
- Facilitating teacher teams and inquiry cycles
- Integrating culturally responsive pedagogy
- Supporting multilingual learners and students with disabilities
- Incorporating instructional technology into classroom practice

Teacher Center Central staff supplement this work through targeted coaching, data-driven consultation, and professional development in the Science of Reading, effective coaching strategies, and culturally sustaining practices.

Last year, thanks to $5.6 million in City Council and Speaker's Initiative funding, UFTTC expanded access to essential resources—opening 11 new sites, a 60% increase since 2020–21. UFTTC also played a critical role in the NYC Reads/Reading for All initiative, ensuring educators received the training needed to implement new literacy curricula with fidelity.

UFTTC continues to meet schools' most urgent needs, including supports for literacy, mathematics instructional shifts, culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed strategies, and targeted supports for newcomers, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.

Officers: Michael Mulgrew *President*, LeRoy Barr *Secretary*, Michael Sill *Assistant Secretary*, Victoria Lee *Treasurer*, Thomas Brown *Assistant Treasurer*
Vice Presidents: Karen Alford, Mary Jo Ginese, Anne Goldman, Leo Gordon, Janella Hinds, Richard Mantell, Mary Vaccaro

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

The UFT Teacher Center is also committed to strengthening early childhood education through the Provider Professional Education Program (PPEP) and the United Network for Early Childhood Education (UNECE). Together, these programs support family childcare providers and early childhood educators serving children from birth to age five.

These programs provide:
- On-site coaching for family childcare providers
- Push-in support for 3K and Pre-K classrooms
- Professional development grounded in best practices for early childhood
- Credentialing pathways for early childhood educators
- A dedicated infant/toddler instructional track

For FY 2026–27, the UFT Teacher Center respectfully requests $6.5 million from the City Council Speaker's Initiative and $4,120,000 in City Council Discretionary Funds. These funds will be used to retain and add central staff, expand access to Teacher Center supports, open new sites, strengthen technology partnerships, and expand early childhood professional development.

With your continued support, the UFT Teacher Center, PPEP, and UNECE will sustain and expand the essential services that New York City educators, families, and students rely on every day.

Respectfully,

Michael Mulgrew
President

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

United Community Schools

UNION PROUD UFT

February 12, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) believes that strong schools are essential to strong communities. Since 2012, UFT has advanced this vision through its United Community Schools (UCS) initiative, which integrates academic, social, and health supports to better serve students and families. UCS transforms schools into community hubs by embedding a community school director at each site to coordinate partnerships among schools, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and government agencies. These partnerships reduce barriers to learning and strengthen outcomes for students and families across New York City.

UCS schools offer essential wraparound services, including tutoring, vision and dental services, college preparation, enrichment opportunities, nutrition supports, and mental health services. As schools continue to address learning loss and the effects of trauma, the need for expanded academic interventions and trauma-informed mental health services has grown. To better support at-risk students, we plan to add social workers who can provide targeted services that reduce chronic absenteeism and keep students connected to school. We will also expand high-quality after-school programming to create safe, structured environments that reinforce both academic and social development while improving overall attendance.

UCS respectfully requests $5,000,000 to sustain and strengthen thirty-two schools through a UCS community school strategy that will prioritize expanding mental health services and extended-day programming. For the past five years, UCS has received $3,000,000 annually from the City Council to support these schools across five boroughs. During this time, funding has remained flat despite rising costs and growing student and family needs, limiting our ability to deliver the level of targeted support required.

Increased investment will enable UCS to expand critical after school services, add social workers, and strengthen our data-driven approach to identifying needs, implementing effective interventions, and monitoring progress. With your support, UCS can continue to build strong school communities and ensure that New York City's students and families have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Michael Mulgrew

UFT President/CEO

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

February 15, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

RE: City Council Support for the Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC) and UFT Member Assistance Program (MAP)

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) is committed to strengthening our communities and the lives of our members and students through essential social-emotional supports. To fulfill this mission, we created the Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC) and the UFT Member Assistance Program (MAP). PLC, a partnership with the NYC Department of Education since 2012, supports schools in becoming equitable, healing-centered communities where every child can develop the skills needed to succeed. Complementing this, MAP was established in 2009 to fill a crucial void in providing mental health and well-being services to our nearly 200,000 members, their students, and their families.

Together, these programs provide a comprehensive, holistic approach to school community wellness. Supports include:

- **Professional Development and Coaching**: Offering individual and team coaching for educators and administrators alongside healing-centered professional development.
- **Restorative and Evidence-Based Practices**: Integrating Community Circles, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS).
- **Mental Health Clinical Advocacy**: Providing mental health professionals uniquely qualified to clinically assess and advocate for the well-being of NYC educators and their families.
- **24/7 Crisis Support**: Operating a helpline available via call, text, and chat in nearly 100 languages for crisis de-escalation, suicidality, and mental health resources.
- **Wellness Initiatives**: Facilitating weekly support groups, yoga and mindfulness workshops, and wellness sessions covering nutrition and stress management.

Last year, City Council funding was vital in expanding these services. We implemented the 24/7 helpline and provided crisis counseling to over 300 schools impacted by grief and trauma. Additionally, MAP has provided Narcan training to over 100 educators and continues to offer professional learning for thousands of school clinicians.

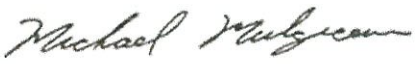
For FY 2026–27, we respectfully request **$1,900,000** in City Council funding. These funds will be used to sustain and expand staff, student, and school community mental health services, including the expansion of MAP's successful programming and PLC's healing-centered curriculum.

With your continued support, PLC and MAP will continue to provide the essential emotional and professional well-being services that New York City educators, families, and students rely on to thrive.

Officers: Michael Mulgrew *President*, LeRoy Barr *Secretary*, Michael Sill *Assistant Secretary*, Victoria Lee *Treasurer*, Thomas Brown *Assistant Treasurer*
Vice Presidents: Karen Alford, Mary Jo Ginese, Anne Goldman, Leo Gordon, Janella Hinds, Richard Mantell, Mary Vaccaro

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

Respectfully,



Michael Mulgrew
President, United Federation of Teachers

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

February 15, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

RE: **City Council Dial-A-Teacher**

Dial-A-Teacher began in January 1980 as a pilot program in seventeen schools in eight districts. Five teachers – one proficient in Spanish – were hired to field students' homework questions. Students throughout the city soon realized it was a place to call if they were stumped by a homework question. By 1986, the program had expanded to include all elementary schools, thanks to funding by the City Council. The UFT has since hired over forty teachers to answer calls and has provided a space where they could work. The City Council funding also allowed the UFT to provide additional reference materials and textbooks so Dial-A-Teacher could serve all elementary students regardless of the nature of their questions.

Word continued to spread that there was a telephone number that students could call for homework help. The program has expanded into higher grades as students accustomed to using the Dial-A-Teacher program as elementary students graduated into middle and high school – and kept calling for help. Dial-A-Teacher began hiring experts in advanced math and science to field calls from these older students. Parents also use the service when they need assistance to help their children with their homework.

Dial-A-Teacher is now operating Monday through Thursday from 4:00 – 7:00 P.M., in nine languages, including Spanish, Mandarin and Bengali. Last year, the program received over 35,000 calls. Our goal is to continue with technological upgrades and staff development that will enhance our ability to service students in the modern educational arena.

Dial-A-Teacher is respectfully requesting $325,000 for FY27. The funds will be used to: (a) Support per-session with additional funding to maintain and increase staffing levels. The Department of Education has not made an increase to the per-session funding in over twenty years while the per-session pay rate continues to climb. As of September 2026, the rate is $63.04 per hour which represents an increase from $60.91 an hour from September 2025. An additional $125,000 will help maintain current staffing levels in addition to hiring 5 additional teachers to help with calls in languages and subject areas in high demand (b) maintain and upgrade an online presence with an application to meet the technology that students are using today; $75,000 (c) procure digital curriculum for multiple subject areas -- curriculum that the Department of Education has identified that aligns with the new standards; $30,000 (d) Technology/computer upgrades for effective functionality of the program.$30,000 (e) promotion of the program in the communities we serve. $50,000 and (f) provide staff with professional development and participation in Professional Associations $15,000.

With your help, Dial-A-Teacher will have a better platform to provide academic assistance to New York City school children and their parents.

Respectfully,

Michael Mulgrew
President

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

February 15, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

RE: City Council Support for the Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence (PROSE) Program

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) is committed to strengthening our communities and the lives of our members and students through essential social-emotional supports and innovative educational practices. To fulfill this mission, we lead the Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence (PROSE) program, a collaboration established in 2014 between the UFT, the New York City school district, and the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). PROSE allows schools with a high level of educator voice to utilize contractual and regulatory flexibilities to better serve the unique needs of their school communities.

For over a decade, the nearly 300 PROSE schools have led groundbreaking change across the city, demonstrating the success of innovative practices that have later been adopted by New York City public schools as a system. PROSE has transformed the landscape of education in NYC. And this work continues. Concord High School in Staten Island has developed a model for a four-day work week that extends student learning on most days, resulting in huge increases in student credit accumulation. John Wayne Elementary School has reconfigured workdays so that their students can access instruction in Yiddish, creating a cultural sustaining program that simultaneously supports religious observance with earlier dismissal on Fridays. Dos Puentes Dual Language Elementary School has reconfigured parent teacher conferences to enable students to lead the conversation about their learning in English and Spanish.

Our comprehensive approach to school community wellness and excellence includes:

- **Effective Collaboration**: Fostering deep partnerships between leadership, educators, parents, and students to address community-specific challenges.
- **Innovative Assessment Methods**: Leading the expansion of project-based learning and performance-based assessments as models for state-level reform.
- **Class Size Strategies**: Developing scheduling innovations and positive environments that allow schools to effectively lower class sizes.
- **Support for Newly Arrived Students**: Ensuring that the needs of migrant students and families are met through input from the full school community.
- **Literacy and Family Workshops**: Providing bilingual staff to help parents engage in their children's education and build strong academic foundations.

In recent years, small pilot grants from the AFT's Powerful Partnerships Institute (PPI) provided a vital foundation for building stronger connections between PROSE schools and their parents. These funds enabled

Officers: Michael Mulgrew *President*, LeRoy Barr *Secretary*, Michael Sill *Assistant Secretary*, Victoria Lee *Treasurer*, Thomas Brown *Assistant Treasurer*
Vice Presidents: Karen Alford, Mary Jo Ginese, Anne Goldman, Leo Gordon, Janella Hinds, Richard Mantell, Mary Vaccaro

schools in all five boroughs to collaborate with Community Based Organizations and host events that brought school communities together outside of regular hours.

For FY 2026-27, we respectfully request $300,000 in City Council funding. These funds will be used to sustain and expand these successful efforts, including the provision of mini-grants for school team intervisitations, the hosting of city-wide best practice sharing events, and the funding of an outside evaluation to analyze the program's impact on staff and student outcomes since its inception.

With your continued support, the PROSE program will continue to provide the essential innovative services that New York City educators, families, and students rely on to thrive.

Respectfully,

Michael Mulgrew
President, United Federation of Teachers

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

February 15, 2026

The Honorable Julie Menin, Speaker
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin:

RE: City Council Support for the BRAVE Anti-Bullying Initiative

The BRAVE (Building Respect, Acceptance, Voice, and Empowerment) program is a citywide, prevention-focused initiative committed to ensuring that every student learns in a safe, respectful, and affirming school community. BRAVE provides students, families, and educators with tools and confidence to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying.

BRAVE supports include:
- Workshops and school-based presentations on bullying prevention
- Digital safety and conflict resolution training
- Restorative practice strategies
- Culturally responsive supports

For FY 2027, the United Federation of Teachers respectfully requests $300,000 in City Council Discretionary Funding to expand BRAVE's outreach, enhance community engagement tools, increase workshop availability, and strengthen program coordination.

With your continued leadership and support, BRAVE will deepen its impact by building safer, stronger, and more connected school communities throughout New York City.

Respectfully,

Michael Mulgrew
President, United Federation of Teachers

CC:
Eric Dinowitz, Education Committee Chair
Linda Lee, Finance Committee Chair
Shirley Aldebol, Civil Service and Labor Chair
Tanisha Edwards, Chief Financial Officer, City Council
Richard Lee, Budget Director

Officers: Michael Mulgrew *President*, LeRoy Barr *Secretary*, Michael Sill *Assistant Secretary*, Victoria Lee *Treasurer*, Thomas Brown *Assistant Treasurer*
Vice Presidents: Karen Alford, Mary Jo Ginese, Anne Goldman, Leo Gordon, Janella Hinds, Richard Mantell, Mary Vaccaro

TESTIMONY

NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
CHAIR, ERIC DINOWITZ

Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

Presented on
Monday, March 23, 2026

The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators
Henry Rubio, President
Dale Kelly, Executive Vice President
Stamo Karalazarides, First Vice President

40 Rector Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10006
(212) 823-2020
www.csa-nyc.org

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the City Council.

My name is Henry Rubio, and I am President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators. CSA represents more than 17,000 in-service and retired principals, assistant principals, educational administrators, supervisors, and directors and assistant directors of early childhood centers across New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. We appreciate the Administration's recognition that key areas of the education system have been structurally underfunded for years. The preliminary budget reflects meaningful investments in class size implementation, special education services, early childhood education, and the stabilization of programs such as Summer Rising.

At the same time, funding alone does not ensure successful implementation. School leaders are responsible for translating policy into practice, managing staffing, supervising instruction, maintaining safety, and supporting students and families every day. In each of these areas that follow, our goal is to ensure that investments made at City Hall translate into real improvements for students, educators, and families in every neighborhood.

Early Childhood Education

We strongly support the City's commitment to expanding access to early childhood education. Decades of research confirm what educators and families already know, that high quality early childhood programs improve school readiness, strengthen social and emotional development, increase long-term academic outcomes, and provide critical support to working families. Early childhood education sits at the center of any serious effort to support working families, and CSA supports the Administration's goal of expanding these programs.

However, as school leaders well know, the long-term success of expansion depends on the stability of the workforce responsible for delivering these programs.

Today, New York City's early childhood sector is one of the largest in the nation, with nearly 37,000 educators working across more than 10,000 licensed childcare programs serving families in every borough. According to a comprehensive December 2025 workforce report released by the Day Care Council of New York and authored by Emmy Liss (who now serves as Director of the Mayor's Office of Childcare), the workforce supporting these programs is overwhelmingly female and reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. Approximately 95 percent of childcare workers are women, about 75 percent are non-white or multiracial, more than 40 percent identify as Hispanic, and more than half were born outside the United States.

The same Day Care Council workforce analysis found that the median annual wage for childcare workers in New York City is approximately $38,000, compared to a citywide median wage of roughly $65,000, meaning childcare workers earn less than 95 percent of occupations in the city. As a result, they are twice as likely as other employed New Yorkers to live in poverty, and a significant number rely on public assistance programs such as Medicaid or SNAP.

Our members have lived through previous expansions which succeeded in increasing access, and many families benefited. However, expansion also scaled long-standing inequities. Two early childhood systems now exist side by side, one operated directly by the Department of Education and one operated by community-based organizations, and they remain fundamentally unequal.

CSA represents Directors and Assistant Directors in CBO programs who perform substantially the same work, under the same regulatory requirements, as their counterparts in DOE buildings. Yet they are paid less. Their staff are paid less. Their programs operate with fewer resources. This inequity has persisted for years despite repeated commitments to parity.

These compensation disparities have real consequences for workforce stability. Many educators leave community-based programs for DOE positions that offer higher salaries and stronger benefits. Recruitment becomes more difficult, leadership turnover increases, and classrooms become harder to staff. Across the early childhood sector, more than half of teachers leave the field within their first five years, and 57 percent of programs report being short staffed. Even without further expansion, the system requires approximately 5,000 new educators each year simply to replace turnover, and workforce projections suggest that a universal birth-to-five system could require tens of thousands of additional childcare workers.

Leadership stability is particularly affected by compensation inequities. Directors and Assistant Directors in CBOs carry responsibilities that closely mirror those of DOE administrators. They supervise staff, evaluate teacher performance, guide curriculum implementation, manage attendance and payroll systems, oversee budgets, ensure regulatory compliance, and often respond to contracting and grant requirements associated with nonprofit governance.

Yet despite performing comparable supervisory roles, they are compensated on a lower scale. Analyses included in the Day Care Council workforce report estimate that directors who remain in community-based programs can lose more than $2 million in earnings over the course of a 25-year career compared to similar leadership positions within the DOE system. No education system can sustain leadership stability when the professionals responsible for running programs face such a significant financial penalty for remaining where they are most needed.

In addition to compensation inequities, providers continue to face serious operational challenges related to delayed payments from the DOE. In recent years, community-based programs have experienced chronic payment delays that have made it difficult to meet payroll, pay rent, and maintain basic services. The City Council has already examined these failures through oversight hearings because centers have at times been forced to operate for months without reimbursement for services already delivered. These delays create financial instability, push programs into debt, and threaten closures even as demand for early childhood seats continues to grow.

Funding structures also contribute to instability. Many community-based providers operate under enrollment-driven funding models in which program budgets are tied directly to the number of students enrolled. Even small fluctuations in enrollment can create significant financial gaps for nonprofit providers operating on narrow margins. Unlike DOE schools, which operate within more stable institutional budgeting frameworks, community-based providers often absorb the financial risk created by shifting enrollment patterns.

CSA supports the Administration's vision for early childhood education. But we urge the city to address the full system, not just access. True success requires pay parity, workforce stability, operational reliability, and respect for the professionals who lead these programs every day. If New York City is going to continue expanding early childhood education, it must first fix the inequities that have defined it for too long.

School Safety

School safety remains one of the most urgent issues facing our schools. The Chancellor has rightly identified safety as a core pillar of his education strategy, and CSA strongly agrees. Children cannot learn when they are anxious or afraid. Families cannot fully trust the system if they do not feel confident sending their children into school buildings each morning. Educators cannot teach effectively when they are managing constant disruptions or responding to unresolved safety concerns.

In recent years, school leaders have seen a noticeable increase in anxiety among students and families. Parents consistently share heightened concern about social media-driven conflicts, mental health challenges, and incidents of violence both inside and outside school buildings. Students are carrying trauma into classrooms. School leaders are spending increasing amounts of time responding to behavioral crises, peer conflicts, and emotional distress.

New York City schools are currently supported by approximately 3,676 school safety agents, and the New York City Independent Budget Office reported in February 2025 that the number of school safety agents had declined by 28 percent (a loss of 1,413 positions) compared with July 2019 levels, reflecting a substantial reduction in the school safety workforce over the past several years (New York City Independent Budget Office, February 2025).

Meanwhile, safety personnel continue to intercept dangerous items on a regular basis. Police reporting found that during the 2023–2024 school year NYPD school safety personnel confiscated approximately 3,700 dangerous instruments and 278 weapons in New York City public schools, representing thousands of situations in which trained personnel prevented potentially dangerous incidents from escalating.

School safety agents play a critical role in maintaining secure and welcoming school environments. They are often the first adults students see when they enter the building and the last when they leave. In many schools, safety agents are trusted figures who build relationships with families over years. They know the children by name. They recognize when something feels off. They de-escalate conflicts, support school staff during emergencies, and provide reassurance to parents. For many students, safety agents function as steady, familiar adults, often described by families as trusted uncles or aunts who help anchor the school community.

Despite their importance, the number of school safety agents has declined in recent years, leaving many buildings understaffed and school administrators overly burdened and concerned for the safety of their students and staff. For several years now, CSA has repeatedly raised concerns about this shortage and its impact on daily operations. While recruitment challenges are

frequently cited, there has not yet been a comprehensive, systemwide strategy to address recruitment, retention, compensation, deployment, and working conditions.

Recent incidents reported across New York City illustrate the kinds of situations school leaders and safety personnel are managing every day:

In September 2025, a 16-year-old student in Queens allegedly brought a loaded 9-millimeter handgun to school and posted threats on social media about shooting up the building.

In October of this school year, police recovered a loaded handgun from a student in Brooklyn, a school building that does not have permanent metal detectors.

In November, a 17-year-old student was slashed in the head and neck with a scalpel during a hallway fight inside a Bronx school and was transported to the hospital.

Right before December holidays**,** a 12-year-old boy was charged with attempted murder after stabbing another 12-year-old in the chest at a Brooklyn school.

In January 2026, two separate students brought loaded firearms into two different New York City schools on the same day.

Even when violence occurs outside the building, the consequences immediately affect the school day: that same month, a Manhattan school building in Chelsea was placed on lockdown after gunfire erupted in a nearby park, forcing students and teachers to shelter in place.

In February, a school safety agent in Brooklyn was stabbed while attempting to break up a fight near a school during dismissal.

And earlier this month, an 11-year-old student stabbed another child inside a Bronx school, sending the victim to the hospital. Meanwhile more than a dozen students were injured in a pepper spray incident at a Queens school.

These incidents represent only a fraction of the events school leaders manage each year. Even when situations are contained quickly, they leave lasting impacts on students, staff, and families. Each incident requires investigation, counseling, communication with families, and often weeks of follow-up to stabilize the school community. This is a growing strain on administrators who must quickly and appropriately address these incidents to support their students and families.

Safety also extends beyond physical security. Student well-being is deeply connected to mental health supports, restorative practices, and access to caring adults who can intervene early when problems arise. The New York City Department of Health reported in September 2025 that 35 percent of New York City public high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless in 2023, up from 27 percent in 2013, while 18 percent reported seriously considering suicide and 14 percent reported a suicide attempt in 2023. These statistics are drawn from the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is conducted every two years, making 2023 the most recent year of available citywide data.

At the same time, many schools lack adequate mental health staffing. A December 2025 report from New York City Comptroller Brad Lander found that 53 percent of New York City schools do not meet recommended guidance counselor ratios, and that the city averages one school psychologist for every 574 students, more than double the recommended ratio of one psychologist per 250 students (Office of the New York City Comptroller, December 2025).

Principals report that many conflicts stem from untreated anxiety, housing instability, social media pressures, and unresolved trauma. Without adequate counseling services, restorative programs, and school-based mental health professionals, schools are often left responding to crises rather than preventing them.

CSA continues to advocate for the restoration and expansion of restorative justice programs, school-based mental health supports, peer mediation, and guidance counseling services. These resources are not optional. When students have access to counseling, when conflicts are addressed through structured restorative practices, and when families are engaged as partners, schools become safer and more stable.

Technology also plays a role, and CSA appreciates recent investments in cameras, entry systems, and scanners. However, these tools must be fully functional and properly maintained. Nonworking equipment, understaffed entry points, and inconsistent safety screening protocols create new vulnerabilities rather than reducing risks.

Leadership capacity is another critical factor. Assistant principals are often the first responders to student crises, medical emergencies, and safety incidents. They coordinate with safety agents, support teachers, communicate with families, and stabilize school operations in real time. As class size implementation brings thousands of new teachers into the system, ensuring sufficient supervisory staffing becomes even more important so that school leadership teams have the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to safety concerns.

CSA stands ready to work with the Administration and the City Council to strengthen safety across all school communities so that every child feels secure, every family feels confident, and every educator can focus on teaching and learning. We look forward to any future hearing that would allow us to examine these safety challenges in greater depth and to work collaboratively with policymakers to explore solutions in a more comprehensive and sustained way.

Professional Development

CSA supports school leaders not only through advocacy but through sustained professional development delivered by our Executive Leadership Institute. For more than two decades, ELI has provided New York City principals, assistant principals, educational administrators, and early childhood directors with training designed by school leaders for school leaders, grounded in the realities of New York City schools.

ELI offers many single-topic workshops each year on timely and practical subjects, including instructional leadership, restorative practices, mental health supports, science of reading implementation, chronic absenteeism, family engagement, and crisis management. In addition,

ELI provides structured, year-long programs for new and experience administrators who want to reinvest in their professional growth. These programs focus on instructional supervision, school culture, staff development, operational management, and equity-centered leadership.

The centerpiece of ELI's work is ALPAP, CSA's Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals, which serves as a principal preparation program. ALPAP is a year-long experience that pairs aspiring principals with veteran mentors who are currently leading schools. Participants engage in seminars, field-based learning, action research, and direct coaching. They build practical leadership skills while developing professional networks that continue long after the program ends. ALPAP has helped prepare hundreds of school leaders for principalship and remains one of the most effective leadership pipelines in the City.

CSA is trusted with professional development because our programs are created by New York City school leaders who understand New York City schools. Our facilitators are practitioners. Our content reflects the instructional frameworks, compliance requirements, staffing realities, and community dynamics that principals face every day. This credibility matters. School leaders engage deeply with ELI because the learning is relevant, practical, and immediately applicable.

We are asking the Council for increased investment of $1.2 million in ELI, bringing the total to $2.2 million, because this moment represents a critical turning point.

For many years, professional development relied heavily on in-person workshops. While those remain valuable, the pandemic accelerated a shift toward virtual learning, and school leaders have embraced it. Virtual sessions allow administrators to participate from their buildings, reduce travel time, and balance professional learning with demanding schedules. Attendance has increased, and engagement has broadened across boroughs.

At the same time, school leaders are increasingly asking for asynchronous learning. Principals and assistant principals work long days and often cannot attend live sessions at fixed times. They are requesting high-quality online courses that can be completed at their own pace, while still earning required certifications and professional learning credits. This flexibility is essential for leaders who are managing staffing shortages, student needs, and operational challenges throughout the school day.

CSA is preparing to transform its offerings by converting much of our existing content into asynchronous formats while continuing to offer live workshops and mentoring. This will allow us to reach more school leaders, provide consistent learning across the system, and support administrators in ways that fit the realities of their schedules. This transition requires significant investment in curriculum development, digital platforms, instructional design, and staffing.

A critical component of this expansion is artificial intelligence literacy. AI is already reshaping education. Yet many school leaders have not received structured training on how to responsibly integrate AI into instruction, operations, and school culture. CSA believes that systemwide transformation begins with principals.

We are developing professional learning specifically focused on AI, created by New York City administrators for New York City administrators, covering best practices for instructional use, staff support, student safety, data privacy, and ethical implementation. Increasing AI literacy among school leaders and administrators will produce dividends across the system. It will strengthen instructional leadership. It will support teachers as they adapt their practice. It will help schools operate more efficiently. It will ensure that students benefit from emerging technologies in thoughtful and equitable ways.

CSA is seeking increased funding for ELI so that we can expand asynchronous learning, strengthen mentoring for new leaders, grow ALPAP, deepen training in restorative practices and mental health supports, and build a comprehensive AI professional development program for school leaders citywide. As the system faces rising retirements, leadership turnover, class size implementation, and growing student needs, professional development is not optional. It is essential infrastructure. Investing in school leaders is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for students, families, and communities.

Class Size Law Implementation

CSA has always supported smaller class sizes. Educators understand that when teachers have fewer students, they are better able to provide differentiated instruction, build relationships, identify learning gaps, and spend meaningful time with each child. Smaller classes create stronger classroom communities and improve academic outcomes. For these reasons, CSA supported the class size legislation at the state level.

From the beginning, however, we have been clear that reducing class size must be done responsibly. We warned early that successful implementation would require sufficient staffing, adequate funding, and available space. Without all three, schools would be placed in impossible positions and students would ultimately bear the consequences.

Over the past two years, CSA has worked closely with the DOE and UFT to move implementation forward in a practical way. Principals were asked to analyze their buildings, assess staffing needs, evaluate space constraints, and report back on what their schools would require meeting the mandates. We appreciate that the City used this information to guide funding decisions and to direct additional resources to schools that demonstrated need.

We were encouraged when the City committed funding for thousands of new teachers and more than one hundred additional assistant principals. CSA has consistently emphasized that hiring teachers alone will not be enough. If thousands of new educators enter the system, schools also need supervisors who can provide instructional coaching, professional development, and operational stability. APs play a central role in mentoring new teachers, maintaining consistency across classrooms, and responding to daily challenges in school buildings. We were pleased that the City recognized this reality, and we continue to advocate for further supervisory support as implementation continues toward the eighty percent compliance threshold.

While staffing has begun to improve, one major challenges have become increasingly clear.

Many schools simply do not have the physical capacity to add classrooms. New construction has not kept pace with enrollment growth, and there has not been sufficient progress in identifying where additions to existing buildings are feasible or where entirely new schools are required. Without a comprehensive facilities strategy tied directly to class size implementation, principals are left trying to solve structural problems at the building level with limited options. Space constraints remain one of the most significant barriers to full compliance.We must priotize the facility retrofit requests that principals have already submitted to increase additional classrooms and the City must begin to identify locations for new school buildings. The City should also consider leasing existing Catholic school building that are closed and office space that can be retrofitted to create new schools,

Lastly, CSA also remains concerned about the financial structure supporting implementation. Fair Student Funding was designed around class sizes that will no longer exist. When schools reduce enrollment to meet new caps, they lose per pupil funding even as they are required to staff additional classrooms. Without adjustments to Fair Student Funding, schools may be forced to cut programs or support services to cover basic instructional costs. The funding formula must eventually be updated to reflect the realities created by the law.

Additional Priorities

In addition to the areas already discussed, CSA urges the Council to continue supporting several programs and operational needs that are essential to school stability and student success.

CSA strongly supports expanded investment in Career and Technical Education. CTE programs provide students with industry-aligned instruction, hands-on experience, and pathways to meaningful careers. School leaders see firsthand how these programs engage students who may otherwise feel disconnected from traditional academic models. Yet access remains uneven across boroughs and communities. CSA urges increased funding to expand CTE and career pathway offerings so that every student has access to career-connected learning, including apprenticeships and internships, particularly in high schools serving high-need populations.

Equally important is early exposure to digital literacy and computer science in elementary and middle schools. Students must develop foundational skills in computational thinking and responsible technology use at an early age. CSA continues to advocate for dedicated funding for computer science instruction, professional development for educators, and equitable access to devices and curriculum resources so that students across all neighborhoods are prepared for high school, college, and an evolving workforce.

CSA also supports expanded investment in STEAM Centers that provide students with opportunities in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. These centers expose young people to robotics, design, and emerging fields while building creativity and problem-solving skills. School leaders urge that these opportunities be made available in every borough, not concentrated in a limited number of communities.

Community Schools remain another critical support structure. These schools provide wraparound services that address food insecurity, health care access, housing instability, and family

engagement. When paired with strong instructional programming, Community Schools help stabilize neighborhoods and improve attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes. CSA encourages continued investment in community schools.

Access to functioning technology remains essential. Schools continue to rely on student devices for instruction, assessment, and communication with families. CSA urges the City to continue funding the purchase, maintenance, and repair of devices so that technology does not become an unfunded mandate placed on individual schools.

Mental health and student support services remain an urgent concern. While safety infrastructure is important, many of the challenges school leaders manage each day are rooted in anxiety, trauma, housing instability, and social pressures. CSA is concerned that several critical programs do not appear in the FY27 preliminary budget, including restorative justice initiatives, intensive school-based mental health supports, Learning to Work, and specialized wraparound services for students with disabilities. These programs play a preventative role and reduce crisis-driven responses. Their absence places additional strain on principals, teachers, and support staff while leaving vulnerable students without needed services.

Conclusion

CSA appreciates the Administration's recognition that New York City's education system requires sustained investment in early childhood education, class size implementation, special education services, school safety, and leadership development.

At the same time, school leaders see every day that funding decisions made at City Hall translate directly into classroom conditions, staffing stability, and student well-being. Expanding early childhood education requires resolving long-standing inequities in compensation and payment systems. Implementing class size mandates requires adequate staffing, space planning, and funding structures that reflect current realities. Ensuring school safety requires investments in people, mental health supports, and leadership capacity, not just infrastructure. Strengthening professional development requires preparing current and future leaders for the evolving demands of their roles, including responsible integration of emerging technologies.

CSA's members are responsible for turning policy into practice. They manage complex organizations, support educators, partner with families, and care for students under increasingly challenging conditions. They are committed to delivering on the City's goals, but they cannot do so without stable systems, equitable funding, and sustained support.

CSA looks forward to continuing to work with the Administration and the City Council throughout the budget process to ensure that these investments lead to meaningful improvements in school communities across all five boroughs. We thank you for your continued partnership and for your commitment to New York City's students, families, and educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: FY 2027 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 23, 2026

Board of Directors
Kimberley D. Harris, *President*
Jessica A. Davis, *Treasurer*
Eric F. Grossman, *President Emeritus*
Carmita Alonso
Matt Berke
Whitney Chatterjee
Matt Darnall
Brian Friedman
Jamie A. Levitt, *past president*
Maura K. Monaghan
Jon H. Oram
Jonathan D. Polkes
Victoria Reese
Ashish Shah
Misti Ushio
Veronica M. Wissel

Executive Director
Maria M. Odom

Chief Operating Officer
Melkis Alvarez-Baez

Deputy Director
Matthew Lenaghan

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the education budget. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 50 years, AFC has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the New York City school system.

We appreciate that the Preliminary Budget extends and baselines funding that had previously been allocated only through June 2026 for preschool special education evaluations, services, and staffing, as well as for Summer Rising, and increases funding for needed District 75 classes and contracted related services.

However, several impactful education programs still have funding set to expire this June, including immigrant family outreach, restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, Sensory Exploration, Education, & Discovery (SEED) programs, Learning to Work, and more. The City should extend and baseline funding for these programs.

In addition, given the urgent unmet needs we see daily in our work with families, the City must do more than maintain the status quo. We urge the City to make the following investments to help address systemic violations, better support students, and save money in the long run. The City should add:

- Funding to ensure every preschooler with a disability receives the evaluations, services, and classes they need; the promise of universal child care must not leave behind children with disabilities.
- $100M to address the shortage of service providers for students with disabilities across grade levels; mandated services are not optional.
- $20M to expand effective reading intervention for middle and high school students; families should not have to sue for private tutoring so their children can learn to read.

151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor | New York, NY 10001 | Tel (212) 947-9779 | Fax (212) 947-9790
www.advocatesforchildren.org

- $8M to hire behavioral specialists; schools should be able to call upon professionals with the expertise needed to support them in meeting students' behavioral and mental health needs.
- $8M to hire English Language Learner (ELL) instructional specialists; schools with high numbers of ELLs should have a dedicated professional ensuring these students receive appropriate academic instruction and support.
- $3M for interim transportation for students in foster care waiting for school bus service to begin; students placed in the care and custody of the City should be able to get to school.
- $2M to expand travel training; students with disabilities should get the training needed to navigate public transportation on their own, increasing independence and expanding access to jobs and internships while reducing reliance on yellow bus service.
- $450M in capital funding over five years to make more schools accessible; nobody should be turned away from a school because they can't get in the building.

More information is in the attached budget agenda.

As the budget process moves forward, we look forward to working with you to sustain critical education programs already up and running and secure additional needed investments. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

City Education Budget Priorities for FY 2027

Sustain impactful programs.

The Fiscal Year 2026 budget restored funding for many impactful education programs that would have otherwise been rolled back or eliminated and made new, needed investments in early childhood education. While a number of programs were baselined last year or in Mayor Mamdani's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, others were funded for one year only. The City must extend and baseline funding for these programs so that they will continue beyond this year.

Key programs funded with one-year city dollars expiring in June 2026 and left out of the Preliminary Budget include:

- Immigrant Family Communication and Outreach ($4M)
- Restorative Justice ($6M)
- Mental Health Continuum ($5M)
- Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) programs ($12M)
- Promise NYC ($25M)
- Learning to Work ($31M)

Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

While we appreciate that the Mayor's Preliminary Budget extends and baselines last year's new investment of $70M for preschool special education services, evaluations, and staffing, even *with* this funding, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has been unable to fully meet its legal obligations to preschoolers with disabilities. The City must invest the additional resources needed to ensure all preschoolers receive the special education evaluations and services they need and have the right to receive. It is also essential for the City to keep moving forward by increasing investments to address the pressing needs we see on the ground in our work with families every day. We urge the City to:

- Address the shortage of service providers and fulfill the City's legal obligation to students with disabilities across grade levels ($100M).
- Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for middle and high school students who need more help learning to read ($20M).
- Hire behavioral specialists to support schools in meeting the behavioral and mental health needs of students ($8M).
- Establish the position of English Language Learner (ELL) instructional specialist to ensure ELLs receive appropriate academic instruction and support ($8M).
- Provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting school bus service ($3M).
- Expand travel training to help students with disabilities learn to travel independently ($2M).
- Make more schools accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities ($450M in capital funding over five years).

Sustain impactful programs funded with city funding scheduled to expire in June 2026.

The following education programs are funded, in whole or in part, with one-year city funding set to expire in June unless extended in the FY 2027 budget. The funding amounts listed are the dollar amounts needed merely to sustain these existing programs at their current funding levels; unless funding is extended, students will lose access to these programs and services. The City should extend and baseline funding for these programs.

MULTI-FACETED IMMIGRANT FAMILY COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH ($4M)

This initiative strengthens New York City Public Schools' (NYCPS') communication with immigrant families—many of whom would otherwise be left without important information—by using local ethnic media to share information about their language access rights, sending paper notices to families' homes, reaching families via phone calls and text messages, helping schools bolster their translation and interpretation systems, and collaborating with immigrant-facing community-based organizations to create and launch information campaigns. This work is fully aligned with the new Administration's focus on increasing parent engagement but is currently funded solely with $4M in one-year city funding set to expire this June. It is critical for this initiative to continue, particularly at a time when changes in federal policies could lead families to keep their children out of school or avoid accessing educational services for which they are eligible.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ($6M)

All students deserve schools where they feel safe and supported. However, without sufficient resources and appropriate alternatives for addressing behavior and helping students navigate conflict, schools will continue to resort to suspensions—which do not repair relationships or make schools safer; disproportionately impact students of color, students with disabilities, and youth who are homeless or in the foster system; and have been linked with lower educational attainment and higher odds of future contact with the juvenile or criminal legal system. Restorative justice practices enable schools to keep students in the classroom while helping them resolve conflicts and build and repair relationships. We appreciate that the FY 2026 budget included $12M in increased city funding to replace expired federal stimulus dollars. However, while $6M of this funding was baselined in the FY 2026 budget, the remaining $6M was funded for one year only.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM ($5M)

The Mental Health Continuum is a cross-agency partnership (NYCPS, Health + Hospitals, Department of Health & Mental Hygiene) to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare. This innovative model, which was highlighted in the City Council's Mental Health Roadmap, supports students at 50 high-needs schools through school partnerships with H+H mental health clinics, dedicated staff to provide students with timely access to mental health services, a NYC Well hotline to advise school staff, mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis, and training for school staff in Collaborative Problem Solving to build

their capacity to address student behavior. This program is serving thousands of students. However, the $5M for this initiative (NYCPS: $787K, H+H: $3.74M, DOHMH: $472K) is set to expire in June.

SENSORY EXPLORATION, EDUCATION, AND DISCOVERY (SEED) PROGRAM ($12M)

The SEED program provides students with intensive sensory needs with small group support from occupational and physical therapists so they are better able to function in the classroom. This popular program, which was originally funded with temporary federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars, has been funded through a grant from the New York State Education Department since the stimulus funds expired two years ago, but the state grant expires this year.

PROMISE NYC ($25M)

No child should be turned away from an early learning program. In January 2023, the City launched Promise NYC to increase access to subsidized child care for children who would otherwise be ineligible for existing programs due to federal eligibility requirements. The program allows around 1,000 children to enroll in early care and education programs—helping prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond, while also enabling their parents to work and connect with resources. However, the full $25M in Administration for Children's Services (ACS) funding for Promise NYC will run out at the end of June if not extended in the FY 2027 budget.

LEARNING TO WORK ($31M)

Learning to Work provides support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan. Through this program, community-based organizations partner with transfer schools and Young Adult Borough Centers to offer students paid internships and in-depth job readiness and college and career exploration activities. The program's funding currently includes $31M in one-year city dollars set to expire in June—representing around 70% of the program's total budget.

NOTE: ***The above is not a comprehensive list of important education programs at risk; other initiatives funded with one-year expiring city funding include:***

- Infant/toddler seats in high-need communities ($10M)
- Early childhood education outreach ($5M)
- Student Success Centers ($3.3M)

Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

Ensuring that key programs remain funded at their current levels is important, but not sufficient to meet student needs. In our work on the ground with families, we see a significant need for additional supports, including the following investments.

Address the shortage of service providers and fulfill the City's legal obligation to students with disabilities ($100M).

More than 7,500 school-aged students with disabilities ended the 2024–25 school year still waiting for their legally mandated speech therapy to begin, while more than 6,600 students were waiting for occupational therapy, more than 5,400 students were waiting for counseling, and more than 650 students were waiting for physical therapy. Many more students waited months before their services began—services that NYCPS had determined were necessary for them to receive an appropriate education.

While the City has many choices when it comes to the budget, providing mandated services to students with disabilities is not optional. Federal and state law require the City to deliver all services specified in students' IEPs and to allocate sufficient funding to do so. Persistent service gaps and delays represent a failure to meet these legal obligations and undermine students' educational outcomes.

The City should add sufficient funding to ensure that all students receive their mandated services. This includes prioritizing the hiring of additional NYCPS service providers and adding per-session service slots for speech therapy and ninth session service slots for occupational and physical therapy so in-house providers can serve more students during the school day. When NYCPS is unable to assign a provider, it must issue a Related Service Authorization (RSA) voucher for families to obtain services privately. However, families often struggle to find providers willing to accept RSAs due to grossly inadequate reimbursement rates. To make RSAs a viable option, the City should increase RSA rates; establish a streamlined process for families to obtain higher rates without having to pursue due process hearings, similar to the existing process currently available to families of children attending private schools; and designate and train NYCPS staff to proactively assist parents in identifying providers who can serve their children through RSAs.

The City should add at least $100M—and whatever additional funding is necessary—to eliminate service backlogs, address the provider shortage, and ensure that every student with a disability receives the services mandated by their IEPs.

Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for middle and high school students who need more help learning to read ($20M).

One of the most fundamental responsibilities of our public schools is to teach children how to read. Strong literacy skills are essential for future employment, post-secondary education, and full participation in civic life. Yet far too many NYC students struggle to become skilled readers: only 56% of City students in grades 3–8, including just 27% of students with disabilities, are reading proficiently, according to the 2025 New York State tests. At AFC, we continue to hear from low-income families whose children have been struggling with reading for years, who have been unable to get help within NYCPS, and for whom paying for private tutoring—as families with greater resources routinely do—is simply not an option.

The City has taken important steps forward with NYC Reads, and it is critical to both sustain the progress made so far as well as to go further to ensure *all* students get the literacy support they need. Even when core instruction is strong, there will always be some students who need extra help and individualized attention to become strong readers, and thousands of middle and high

school students missed out on the chance to receive effective reading instruction in elementary school. Many older youth, in particular, who have disabilities like dyslexia or are struggling with reading are unable to access the one-on-one or small group support they need, and their ongoing difficulty with reading takes a toll on their academic progress and social-emotional well-being.

The City should invest $20M to scale up promising initiatives and provide intensive intervention to more adolescents who need support to become proficient readers.

Hire behavioral specialists to support schools in meeting the behavioral and mental health needs of students ($8M).

Students with behavioral challenges are too often punished rather than supported, leading to suspensions and unnecessary involvement of emergency services or law enforcement—responses that disproportionately harm students of color and students with disabilities. While the City has invested in social-emotional learning and mental health supports, many schools still lack consistent, on-site access to trained professionals who can help staff respond effectively to challenging behaviors and prevent crises before they occur.

Schools need access to behavioral specialists who can work directly with educators and school staff to model, coach, and support the implementation of effective, individualized behavior supports for students, including students with autism and other disabilities, and provide concrete recommendations for helping students remain in the classroom. These specialists could also provide professional development in culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and evidence-based practices and help develop school-wide strategies that promote positive behavior. We urge the City to invest $8 million to hire at least one behavior specialist per school district, along with necessary supervisors and support from the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning, to support students directly and equip school staff with the tools needed to reduce crisis responses and improve academic and social-emotional outcomes.

The City should invest $8M to hire at least one behavioral specialist per district.

Establish the position of English Language Learner (ELL) instructional specialist to ensure ELLs receive appropriate academic instruction and support ($8M).

Around 152,000 NYCPS students—more than 1 in 6—are ELLs, and more than 150 schools each have 200 or more ELLs enrolled. Data show that multilingual students have the potential to outperform their peers when provided with appropriate support. Yet, too many ELLs do not receive the targeted language and academic instruction they need to succeed. The City's ELLs continue to perform well below grade-level standards, with only 12% of ELLs in grades 3–8 proficient in reading and just 30% proficient in math in 2025. Particularly in schools with large numbers of underperforming ELLs, it's critical to have a dedicated educator focused on ensuring these students receive the support necessary to make academic progress.

We urge the City to invest $8M to pilot a program for 50 schools with high numbers of ELLs to hire an ELL instructional specialist. This educator would be responsible for ensuring that ELLs at their respective schools receive grade-level instruction in core subjects; receive bilingual or English as a New Language (ENL) instruction as required by law; have access to additional academic supports and intervention when needed; and remain on track to pass their classes and be

promoted to the next grade. The ELL instructional specialist would also make sure that families of ELLs feel welcomed and engaged, understand their children's progress, and are informed of their rights and options for language support. Through this investment, specialists would receive ongoing professional development and tools from the Division of Multilingual Learners and the Office of Curriculum and Instruction to support effective implementation.

The City should invest $8 million to hire ELL instructional specialists and strengthen academic outcomes for ELLs.

Provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting school bus service ($3M).

When students are removed from their homes and families and placed into foster care, school is often the only source of stability in their lives. Recognizing the importance of school continuity, federal and state law require school districts to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original school, unless it is in their best interest to transfer to a new school. Despite these requirements, it often takes weeks or even months for NYCPS to begin school bus service for these students.

While students await bus service, NYCPS offers a prepaid rideshare service, but it does not become available until a student has been waiting for a bus for more than ten school days and requires an adult chaperone to accompany the student—an expectation that is often impossible for working foster parents who may be caring for children who attend multiple schools. While the City also offers transportation reimbursement, it will not reimburse for the cost of a chaperone, and the daily reimbursement cap is often insufficient to cover rideshare services that include a vetted chaperone or longer cross-borough trips.

As a result, many students miss school or are forced to transfer schools even though it is not in their best interest to do so. During the 2024–25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

There are feasible solutions. For example, the City could contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require additional chaperones (such as Kid Car, which operates in NYC, or HopSkipDrive, used by districts including Los Angeles); use ACS or other city-owned vehicles that include escorts, as is done for students placed at the Children's Center; launch a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes; hire aides to accompany students using rideshare services; or, at a minimum, reimburse chaperone costs and increase the daily reimbursement cap to cover longer trips and services such as Kid Car.

The City should invest $3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical moment in their lives.

Expand travel training to help students with disabilities learn to travel independently ($2M).

Travel training equips students with disabilities with the skills needed to navigate public transportation independently—expanding access to internships, work-based learning, and post-

secondary opportunities and reducing reliance on yellow bus service. However, many students with disabilities who could benefit from travel training are unable to access it.

NYCPS' District 75 travel training program has demonstrated positive outcomes, helping students gain independence, confidence, and essential life skills through intensive one-to-one instruction. However, limited capacity and persistent waitlists significantly constrain the program's reach, leaving many eligible students without this service. Opportunities for travel training are even more limited for students with disabilities who attend District 1–32 schools. Furthermore, the current program focuses on travel between home and school, yet it's also important for students to develop the ability to navigate and travel independently to a range of locations.

The City should invest $2M to expand travel training and help address these gaps. This funding would expand access to travel training for students with disabilities in District 1–32 schools, while also increasing capacity within District 75 schools. Funding would also support contracts with experienced community-based organizations that already provide high-quality travel training. These partners could train students directly while also building the capacity of school staff to scale the program. This expansion would help students develop the comprehensive travel skills needed for full participation in their communities, including access to internships, work-based learning, post-secondary opportunities, and employment.

The City should invest $2 million to expand travel training to help students with disabilities use public transportation independently, building critical skills for school, work, and life after high school.

Make more schools accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities ($450M in capital funding over five years).

More than 30 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability, physical barriers to full inclusion remain widespread in New York City's schools—and as a result, New Yorkers with disabilities continue to be excluded from buildings that are central to public life. In fact, only about a third of schools are fully accessible to students, teachers, parents, and community members with disabilities.

Five years ago, the situation was much worse—fewer than one in five schools was fully accessible as of the start of the 2018–19 school year—and New York City invested a historic $750 million in the 2020–2024 Capital Plan to improve school accessibility. While this funding has enabled significant progress, there is much work left to do: NYCPS itself estimated that it would take $1 billion in each of the next four five-year plans to reach "maximum practical accessibility" by 2045.

At a minimum, the City must make the investments necessary to keep pace with the work done over the past five years. The 2025–2029 Capital Plan currently includes $800 million for school accessibility projects, an amount that represents a *decreased* commitment to improving school accessibility once inflation is taken into account.

The City should allocate an additional $450 million—for a total investment of $1.25 billion—for school accessibility projects in the 2025–2029 Capital Plan, with the goal of making at least 45% of buildings that serve as the primary location for a school fully accessible by 2030.

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair

Submitted by:
Faith Behum, UJA-Federation of New York

March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Education, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Faith Behum, and I am a Manager of Government and External Relations at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates nearly $200 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

UJA submits the following recommendations for the FY 2027 budget.

PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

UJA appreciates the baselining of $70 million for preschool special education in the FY 27 preliminary budget. For years, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has struggled to provide an appropriate special education preschool seat to every child who required one. As of May 2025, 29% of preschoolers with disabilities were missing one or more of their legally mandated services like speech therapy or counseling. More than half of those children were receiving none of their mandated preschool special education services. Additionally, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) recently posted information online indicating a shortage of preschool special education classrooms in Spring 2026 that could leave hundreds of young children with disabilities with the most intensive needs without access to a preschool program. It is clear any decrease in funding to preschool special education programs will result in further damage to a system that is already struggling to meet the needs of students with disabilities in a timely manner. The Administration must continue to invest in the resources needed to meet its legal obligation to preschoolers with disabilities and ensure their needs are being met as the City works toward a more universal early childhood education system.

PRE-K AND 3-K PROGRAMS

UJA is thankful to the Mamdani Administration and City Council for their dedication to expanding affordable high-quality child care and early childhood education services to every child in New York City. While significant investments have been promised at the State and City level to advance this goal, funding for outreach to families to inform them about the various City funded early childhood education options was not included in New York City's Preliminary budget. **UJA is requesting $5 million be included and baselined in the**

adopted budget to increase outreach to families across New York City who are eligible for the 3-K and Pre-K program. This funding was included for one year in FY 2026 and will expire at the end of June if the Administration and Councilmembers do not choose to fund outreach efforts in FY 2027.

UJA's non-profit partners provide early childhood education to children ages birth to five across New York City. They provide a wide range of programs and resources to their communities and offer extended hours and year-round care for children, which parents and/or guardians rely on to work and provide for their families. Providers are extremely knowledgeable of the specific needs of the communities and ultimately prepare children for kindergarten and academic success.

These nonprofits oversee New York City funded 3-K and Pre-K programs and hosted private pay programs before publicly funded programs existed. Transitioning to and working in a City funded early childhood education system continues to be challenging. Before creating a City funded universal child care system, it is critical that the Mamdani Administration and City Council understand and address the issues facing nonprofit 3-K and Pre-K providers because these same issues will most likely impact any expansion of child care. Improving the current City funded early childhood education system will lay a stronger foundation to build the universal child care system.

Continued delayed reimbursement from NYCPS threatens the sustainability of the 3-K and Pre-K programs in community-based organizations (CBOs). Since October 2022, NYCPS has slowly improved the timeliness of payments on Birth to Five contracts. While some providers have benefited from this, others still wait to be compensated. One of the biggest issues nonprofits in UJA's network faces is waiting for approval of students. Students must be approved before a program can invoice and be paid. Students not being approved also delays providers' ability to enter data into the vendor portal about completed developmental screenings, which are required to be done 45 days after a child is enrolled. When providers contact their enrollment specialist and/or operational analyst about these issues they struggle to receive concrete suggestions on what can be done to rectify the problems delaying students to be registered.

No City contracted 3-K and Pre-K programs should have to wait months to be compensated for completed work. To address the payment issues facing the 3-K and Pre-K systems, the Mamdani Administration must pay early care and education service providers on time and complete payments owed immediately. NYCPS must fully staff their divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and continue to grant ECE providers the ability to batch multiple months of invoices.

New York City Public Schools is also in the process of extending contracts that were awarded through the current Birth-to-Five RFP. The Birth-to-Five RFP was issued in 2020 and went into effect in the fall of 2021. It includes the City's contracts for Pre-K, 3-K, and Extended Day/Extended Year programs. Providers were recently notified these five-year-old contracts that will be extended two years. The funding in the contracts will not be increased to account for the rising costs providers continue to experience. Because of this, UJA urges the City to immediately implement cost escalators of at least 3% in current Birth to Five Contracts to reflect increased costs for insurance, utilities, and other necessities of maintaining early childhood education programs.

Enrollment procedures create additional issues for families and providers. Currently, families enroll their children in 3-K and Pre-K programs located in CBOs through New York City Public Schools. NYCPS enrolling families in CBO 3-K and Pre-K programs creates an unnecessary step in the enrollment process that families would not have to deal with if they could enroll through the CBOs. It also results in CBOs obtaining their list of enrollees from NYCPS meaning they ultimately have control over who is or is not attending CBO programs. CBOs interact directly with families who are interested in attending their 3-K and Pre-K programs and should be given the option to directly enroll them in their programs. If enrollment continues to be managed through NYCPS, providers should not be penalized for under-enrollment, consistent with protections afforded to early childhood programs operating in public schools. Programs in CBOs should be held harmless for under-

enrollment when NYCPS's district schools are not cited for under-enrollment in their 3-K and Pre-K classrooms.

Lack of comprehensive pay parity across the early childhood education workforce continues to plague the sector as well. The 2019 salary parity agreement eventually resulted in all certified CBO teachers in pre-kindergarten programs receiving the same compensation as entry level NYCPS pre-kindergarten teachers. Not included in this agreement were longevity increases which resulted in teachers who worked in CBO Pre-K programs for multiple years making the same amount as a teacher who is a new hire. Directors and educational directors in CBO Pre-K programs were also not included in the 2019 salary parity agreement. As a result, many are compensated less than the teachers they supervise, resulting in directors and educational directors leaving CBOs for higher paying jobs. Additionally, non-teaching staff in CBOs, including assistants, janitors, cooks, and other staff, are being compensated less than their counterparts in New York City Public Schools.

In 2024, labor contract agreements were made between Local 95 (HeadStart providers) and Local 205 (nonprofit child care centers that contract with NYCPS). Local 215 members and those who are not unionized were not included in these contract agreements. All of the 3-K and Pre-K programs in UJA's network of nonprofits are either members of Local 215 or not unionized. This means these providers are operating on different contract agreements than what was agreed upon for Local 95 and Local 205 and are offering their staff smaller salaries and less benefits due to continuing to work off an outdated salary agreement.

Preschool special education teachers are also among the lowest-paid teachers in New York City, making less than their counterparts in NYCPS. As a result, preschool special education teachers are leaving for higher-paying positions within NYCPS, CBOs have been forced to close their programs, and children are forced to wait at home until a special education seat opens. The lack of providers (speech therapists, occupational therapists, etc.) has forced children in integrated classrooms to wait for their services, causing further harm and developmental delays.

Before expanding the child care system, the City needs to immediately create true pay parity for the entire early childhood workforce. This would include Local 215 and non-unionized CBOs as well as ensure that staff at community-based preschool special education programs are included. The agreement would result in equivalent salaries and benefits for equal levels of education and experience between certified and uncertified early childhood educators inside and outside NYCPS programs. This should also account for the differences in school days, and longer hours worked by CBO educators as well as include longevity increases. A minimum wage floor of $25 an hour must also be included for non-teaching staff in CBOs. Lastly, when contract agreements are achieved, they must be promptly amended to include additional funds for CBOs to have the financial means to compensate their workforce according to those agreements.

New York City families need access to affordable, high quality child care. UJA's nonprofit partners are ready and willing to provide this service. But the City must address the previously stated issues to expand the early childhood education system in a responsible way.

NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jewish day schools have faced increased security threats since October 7, 2023. Schools have invested in additional methods (for example increasing security personnel) to provide a secure learning environment for their students. The increased costs of which have largely been placed on the parents of the students who attend the schools. This has been financially taxing on the families who send their children to Jewish day schools.

In recent years, the student enrollment threshold for the Nonpublic School Security Reimbursement Program was increased making more nonpublic schools eligible to be reimbursed for security services through New York

City funds. The combination of more schools being eligible for this funding as well as the continue rise of antisemitic incidents across New York City has created the need for additional funding to be added to the Nonpublic School Security Reimbursement Program. **UJA is urging the Council and Administration to increase the investment in this program to ensure that all religious and independent schools have access to adequate security funding.**

ADULT LITERACY

Adult literacy is critical to the stability and success of families across New York City. More than 2.2 million adults in the city have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma, yet fewer than 3% are able to access adult education services each year due to insufficient funding and limited capacity.

This gap has direct implications for children and youth. When parents and caregivers are unable to access English language instruction, high school equivalency programs, or basic education, it limits their ability to support their children's academic success, navigate school systems, and access essential services. Strengthening adult literacy is therefore a key strategy for improving outcomes for entire families.

At the same time, adult literacy programs face growing uncertainty. Federal funding remains at risk, and proposed restrictions tied to immigration status could exclude many of the New Yorkers these programs are designed to serve.

To address these challenges, UJA-Federation of New York urges the City Council and Administration to:

1. **Invest $20 million in a new city-funded adult education initiative, Education for Integration and Equity**, to expand access to English language instruction, basic education, high school equivalency, digital literacy, and civics education for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of status.
2. **Increase City Council discretionary funding for adult literacy from $14.5 million to $18 million**, enabling community-based organizations, CUNY programs, and libraries to serve thousands more adult learners.
3. **Consolidate City Council adult literacy funding under the Adult Literacy Forward initiative** to streamline funding, improve program consistency, and strengthen data collection and accountability across providers.

Investing in adult literacy strengthens families, supports children's educational outcomes, and advances economic mobility across generations. UJA urges the City to make these critical investments in the FY27 budget.

CONCLUSION

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist New York City's most vulnerable and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, please contact me at behumf@ujafedny.org or 212-836-1338.

NYC Council Testimony : Preliminary Budget Hearing, Committee on Education

March 24, 2026

Introduction and Thanks: My name is Catherine Trapani, and I am the Assistant Vice President for Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony for this hearing.

About Us: VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Background: Students in temporary housing face enormous obstacles to educational success when compared to their housed peers. Things as straightforward as knowing what your commute to school will look like, identifying an available bus route for young children, knowing what supplies and uniforms may be required and being able to afford those things all become challenging when you don't know where you will be staying. Students can face hours long commutes to and from school, have limited time or even physical space in which to do homework, limited access to technology and more, all because of their housing status. At Volunteers of America-Greater New York, we make every effort to level the playing field for students in shelters across the City by providing supplies and quality services to students in temporary housing and advocating for policies to better support them.

Operation Backpack®: For over 20 years, VOA-GNY has led this signature back to school drive providing every student in our shelters and many more citywide with a backpack stuffed with all the school supplies every child in shelter needs to succeed in school. The DOE has long been a partner to VOA-GNY in this effort but, in 2024, due to unexpected

funding cuts following the loss of COVID era emergency dollars, our program was in jeopardy. We were able to fundraise privately to continue our efforts to equip students with much needed supplies, but it wasn't until the Council stepped in in Fiscal Year 2025 to provide us with $250,000 in financial support that we were able to fully meet the need of every student living in a New York City shelter this past school year.

Thanks to the Council's heroic efforts to restore our funding, we provided backpacks and supplies to every child in shelter who needed one, including within DHS Family with Children shelters, DHS Emergency Shelters for New Arrivals, and HRA Domestic Violence shelters. These high-quality backpacks stuffed with age-appropriate supplies equip students in temporary housing with the tools they need to succeed in school. We were even able to send an additional 1,000 backpacks to PATH, the intake center for homeless families, to ensure any child entering shelter during the school year would be equipped with what they needed.

This year, VOA-GNY is requesting that the Council renew $250,000 in Speaker's Initiative funding for Operation Backpack® to enable VOA-GNY to continue to meet 100% of the need in NYC shelters for another year.

Historically Operation Backpack® has primarily been supported through cash and in-kind donations from private donors with additional support from the NYC Department of Education. The Council's robust support allowed us to meet 100% of the need in NYC shelters, even in the face of record high shelter census and rising costs. Our bulk purchasing allows us to buy deeply discounted supplies, costing approximately $36 per child on average to put together a package with a retail value of $120. Privately raised funds also supported the costs of staff and summer interns, marketing, insurance, and transportation. We are seeking the renewed support of the City Council to offset the rising costs of this program and allow us to continue to meet 100% of the demonstrated need as we prepare for the 2026-2027 school year.

Operation Backpack® is not just a giveaway. It is a targeted approach that ensures that students living in shelters are matched with resources before the first day of school to avoid stigma and start off the school year on equal footing with their housed peers. Our team partners with the NYC Department of Homeless Services, to identify where students are staying in shelters across the city, what grade they are in, what backpacks and school supplies they will need, and based on that information, we match each child in shelter with the necessary supplies and deliver them across New York City so each child could start the school year fully prepared.

Early Learning Centers:

VOA-GNY operates the Bronx Early Learning Center (BELC) is a vibrant, 22-classroom preschool special education program for students aged 2.9-5 years old, many of whom are on the autism spectrum. The strength of this academic model is to recognize and address children's developmental challenges as early as possible, as it sets the foundation for their entire academic success- and the rest of their lives.

Students are placed in classrooms at BELC based on their developmental needs where our team of dedicated New York State-certified and licensed teachers, teaching assistants, therapists and related providers work closely with each student and family to provide tailored educational and therapeutic services that will help build a strong foundation for their school years.

VOA-GNY is heartened that the Mayor's FY27 Budget includes baselined funding for last year's investment of $70 million for preschool special education services and multidisciplinary evaluations. This funding is critical to ensuring that preschoolers with special needs can access the support they have a right to receive.

We respectfully ask that the administration please continue to include our Bronx Early Learning Center in salary increases for NYC Childcare providers and NYCDOE-contracted Head Start Programs to retain and attract qualified childcare staff.

Closing:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Should you have any questions, I can be reached at ctrapani@voa-gny.org.

Respectfully submitted by Catherine Trapani, Assistant Vice President of Public Policy, Volunteers of America-Greater New York

UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES
45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council

FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Education
Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair

Submitted by Kate Connolly
March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing.

UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 840,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses have been community hubs for education for decades, and continue to provide New York City's communities with guidance around academic instruction and enrichment, as well as navigating the Department of Education (DOE) at large. Settlement houses partner directly with NYCPS through a variety of contracted programs. Collectively, our 40 settlement house members in New York City serve as the lead partner for 23 Community Schools and 27 Learning to Work programs. They also serve 25,000 children through DYCD's COMPASS Program, which works closely alongside NYCPS and ensures a strong continuum of support for families, and 14,000 individuals through Beacon programs located in school buildings across the city.

Settlement houses have also pioneered early childhood education in New York City, starting some of the first kindergartens over a century ago and now operating over 80 early childhood education programs serving nearly 8,500 children under the age of 5 each year. They care for children in center-based programs under contract with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), oversee Family Child Care Networks to care for children in home-based settings, and contract with the federal government to provide Head Start and Early Head Start programming.

Our testimony will focus on recommendations to support crucial education programs, and preserve access to care for families across the city, including:

- Early Childhood Education

    - Restore $5 million in ECE outreach funding and ensure language access;
    - Restore and baseline ACS's Promise NYC program at $50 million to provide child care to children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidized child care;
- Restore $3.3 million for Student Success Centers;
- Restore and baseline $31 million for Learning to Work programs; and
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is finally getting the attention it deserves, and United Neighborhood Houses applauds the Mamdani Administration and the New York City Council for their commitment to creating a universal, high-quality early childhood education system. Mayor Mamdani has made significant strides in recent weeks by prioritizing and investing in early childhood education, and more must be done to stabilize the existing system while expanding access to care for families across the city.

Restore $5 million in ECE outreach funding and ensure language access

The FY26 Adopted Budget included one-time funding for early childhood education outreach to help families better understand and access available programs. **We urge the City to restore $5 million in outreach funding** to ensure all families have the support they need to find child care that meets their needs and to maintain continuity of services citywide.

This funding helps families understand their options, navigate complex systems, and access care equitably, while also supporting stable and predictable enrollment for providers. It is especially important that outreach include robust multilingual services and culturally responsive strategies to reach immigrant families and families with limited English proficiency who may face additional barriers navigating enrollment and eligibility systems. Several of our members provide this type of outreach and enrollment support and have seen strong results. We strongly support restoring this funding so these efforts can continue and expand.

Additionally, United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) supports Intro 0579, which would require the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to develop and implement an education and outreach campaign targeting families with children eligible to enroll in 3-K or pre-K. However, we believe the legislation should be expanded to also include infants and toddlers, ensuring that families of younger children receive timely information and support to access available early childhood education and child care programs

Restore and baseline ACS's Promise NYC program at $50 million to provide child care to children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidized child care

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). Since the program launched in FY23, providers have been reporting full enrollment and long waitlists, which demonstrates the need and desire from families to have this support.

Promise NYC was funded at $25 million in the City's FY 2025 budget, and this investment helped clear waitlists across the program and expand access to child care for undocumented and mixed-status families who are otherwise excluded from most public child care programs. However, this funding

was not baselined, and programs are now anticipating that child care services will end on June 30th, leaving families abruptly without care arrangements.

This year, we urge the City to both **baseline and increase funding for Promise NYC to $50 million in the FY 2027 budget**. The success of the program has driven significant demand, and waitlists are growing as providers struggle to keep up with the number of eligible families seeking care. Additional investment would allow the program to serve more families and bring more providers into a model that has proven effective at connecting immigrant families to stable, affordable child care.

We celebrate that child care is receiving the attention and investment it deserves, and we strongly support efforts to expand access so that every child in New York City can benefit from early care and education, regardless of immigration status. However, experience shows that immigrant families are often the first to fall through the cracks when new systems are implemented or existing programs are expanded. Promise NYC has been successful precisely because it was designed to reach families who are otherwise excluded and to work closely with trusted community-based providers.

As the City works toward building a more inclusive and equitable child care system, it is critical to sustain and strengthen Promise NYC so immigrant families do not lose access to essential services during this transition. Maintaining and expanding this program ensures that families can continue accessing the child care they rely on today, while the City builds long-term systems that guarantee equitable access for all families.

It is essential to underscore that **building a truly equitable and effective early childhood education system in New York City will require a broader, more comprehensive commitment**. Expansion alone will not be enough. The City must:

- **Support and strengthen the early childhood education workforce**. The City must get back on the path to parity that was started by the de Blasio Administration in 2019 by re-examining pay scales between community-based and DOE staff, committing to raising salaries for CBO staff to be on par with their DOE counterparts, and address discrepancies in health insurance, retirement support, and longevity differentials as well.
- **Fix contracting and payment challenges**. Currently, contracting delays and payment backlogs cause CBO providers, including settlement houses, undue hardship. Late and inconsistent payments create significant challenges for providers operating on extremely thin margins. The City cannot build a universal system that meets families' child care needs without resolving these infrastructure and payment challenges and ensuring that CBOs are fully and promptly paid for delivering essential services.
- **Invest in infrastructure**. Ahead of the 2-K expansion in the next few years, the City must examine space needs and ensure that there are enough appropriate places for 2-K programming to take place. This will include identifying new sites, while also providing capital funding to repair and upgrade existing locations so they can continue serving families safely and effectively. Expanding access will require both bringing new capacity into the system and stabilizing the infrastructure that already exists, and ensuring that DOHMH has the capacity to permit new spaces.
- **Prioritize quality programming.** Expansion should include strong investments in professional development so educators are well-trained, supported, and equipped to meet the developmental needs of young children. High-quality programs require ongoing training, coaching, and clear career pathways. As expansion moves forward, investments must strengthen both the number of seats available and the depth and quality of services provided.

This is a pivotal moment for New York City. With planned investments in 3-K and the development of new programming for younger children, the City has a real opportunity to build a more comprehensive and equitable system. But that opportunity can only be realized if these foundational challenges are addressed. **With thoughtful planning, coordinated implementation, and sustained investment, New York City can create a system that not only expands access, but also ensures stability for providers, support for educators, and high-quality, reliable care for all families.**

Restore $3.3 Million to Student Success Centers

Students respond better to support that is consistent and individualized to their circumstances. However, in New York City Public Schools, one guidance counselor serves an average of 221 students. This astounding ratio only tells part of the story as post-secondary planning is just one of responsibilities a school guidance counselor is tasked with. With rising concerns about youth mental health and an influx of newly-arrived young people to NYC's public schools, the demands on guidance counselors' time are greater than ever.

Student Success Centers (SSCs) aim to fill this college counseling gap by pairing the expertise of community-based organizations with youth leadership training. In an SSC, youth leaders are trained as Peer Leaders. Together with CBO staff, Peer Leaders provide workshops, college trips, and one-on-one individualized counseling to help students through the college admissions and financial aid processes. The Student Success Center model is available at 34 high schools citywide. Settlement Houses operate 27 of these programs.

It is vital that the City commit to supporting all students navigating postsecondary options and the college admissions systems by restoring this program. UNH urges the City to **restore $3.3 million for the Student Success Center program through sustainable funding sources, and baseline this funding for the outyears**.

Additionally, we urge the City to streamline the FY27 funding process to help providers understand earlier how much funding they should expect per site, and how to access this funding. Lack of clarity from NYCPS and lack of communication from school leadership has led to confusion and delays in payments to CBO partners. Increased transparency and accountability for the roles of all stakeholders will improve the planning and implementation of SSCs.

Invest in Learning to Work

The Learning to Work (LTW) model supports students in Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC) as they work towards their high school diploma and the development of a post-secondary plan. Community based organizations (CBOs) are embedded in the fabric of these schools through LTW contracts with the DOE. In the current school year, Learning to Work programs are available citywide in 46 Transfer Schools and 20 YABCs. Settlement houses operate 27 of these contracts.

This unique program focuses on young people who are not adequately served by the traditional public school model, and provides mentorship, postsecondary planning, and employment opportunities to re-engage them in our education system. According to a 2022 report commissioned by New York City Public Schools and completed by Eskolta School Research and Design, transfer schools graduate 51% of students still enrolled after four years, while traditional schools only graduate 25%.[1] From the 2023 NYC School Survey, students in LTW programs generally felt safer and more supported than non-LTW

[1] Eskolta School Research and Design. "LTW Model Research: What does Learning to work look like at its best?" May 2024. https://sites.google.com/eskolta.org/ltw/home

high schools. Of students in LTW programs, 89% reported that conflicts were resolved fairly at their school, in contrast with 70% at non-LTW schools. Additionally, 93% of LTW students reported that adults at their school helped them plan for the future, in contrast with only 81% of students in non-LTW programs.

Although the FY26 Adopted Budget restored funding for LTW programs through June 2026, this long-time program was not baselined. **The City must restore $31 million for LTW and baseline the full cost of the program to ensure future stability.**

While the long-term future of the LTW program is uncertain due to unstable funding, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in December 2025 (R1231). Despite the LTW program being only partially funded for FY27 and the out years, the RFP lays out a higher total budget of $57.4 million. **To fully enact the current RFP, which is set to commence in July 2027, the City must fund the $14.4 million differential in FY28.**

Beyond concerns about whether funding is secured for the open RFP, providers have also expressed concerns about how NYCPS has proposed to change the program model. For three years, CBO providers met with the NYCPS' Office of Student Pathways (OSP) to inform the redesign of the program, the results of these conversations and program evaluations were outlined in Eskolta School Research and Design's reports. Additionally, UNH worked with LTW providers ahead of the RFP to develop a set of recommendations that were shared with NYCPS. Surprisingly, the new RFP did not incorporate the major recommendations from either Eskolta's report or the providers' recommendations. Instead, the RFP drastically changes the model, which threatens its proven success in reaching the hardest-to-serve young adults, supporting them in navigating life's challenges, graduating, and developing meaningful postsecondary plans.

Concerns with the current RFP are:

- The increased caseload of 1 Advocate Counselor to 75 students (current ratio averages 1:50) is not feasible with this population of students.
- Advocate counselor responsibilities have changed from emotional/mental health supports to post-secondary and vocational learning. In the currently successful model, LTW programs support students at high risk of dropping out of high school by leveraging the strong relationships they build with CBO Advocate Counselors to provide resources and opportunities to guide them through graduation.
- The RFP emphasizes post-secondary planning and work-based learning experiences with no mention of the growing mental health needs of the target population. Current LTW providers have cited this as a growing need, sharing the importance of addressing students' basic needs as part of a strategy to increase their chances of graduating high school.
- Providing internships and other work-based learning opportunities is within the purview of the CBOs in this RFP, but the funding to pay student stipends will be funneled through a DOE centralized system that will place added burdens/steps into the equation. This will also impact LTW providers' ability to support undocumented students at transfer schools and YABCs.

We urge the City to review the concerns of current providers and school leadership staff and amend the RFP to better serve the needs of this vulnerable population of students.

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

Although the FY27 Preliminary Budget has restored funding for summer programming, there is still more work that must be done to prepare for Summer 2026. In addition to tackling the operational issues that have plagued Summer Rising year after year, the City must work with local stakeholders to pilot summer program models other than Summer Rising. The Summer Rising model made sense

when it was first created in Summer 2021, when students had been learning remotely for long periods of time during the COVID-19 pandemic and there were real concerns about learning loss and student readiness to return to school buildings long-term. However, we are now in a different time, and summer 2026 presents us with an exciting opportunity to begin to rethink and reshape summer programming to meet students' current needs.

In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this program, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released *One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families*. Some of our key findings were:

- Many families are dependent on free summer programming provided by the city. 58% of surveyed parents said they did not have a back-up option if Summer Rising was not available, with the percentage rising to 64% for low-income families.
- Middle schoolers expressed frustration with the DOE-led academics. 87% of focus group participants disagreed or felt neutral in regards to the statement "I feel engaged in the morning session" of Summer Rising."
- Despite recognizing the value of summer academic enrichment, many parents participating in the survey expressed frustration over a lack of communication around the DOE-led academic program. Parents reported being unclear about what curriculum was being used, who their students' teachers were, and if their child's learning needs were being met. This was in contrast to reports of regular communication from the CBO staff.
- There are widespread concerns whether students with IEPs and English Language Learners are receiving appropriate accommodations. Over half of CBO staff said that a shortage of paraprofessional support for students with IEPs was one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, some focus group participants who identify as English Language Learners shared that they were excluded from the DOE-led academic portion and given arts & crafts projects instead.

Last year, the Department of Education released the Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis, which used spring 2024 and fall 2024 standardized academic data to compare the academic performance of young people who participated in Summer Rising to those who did not participate in the program. From this data, we can see that middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days saw no statistically significant impact on their Math scores. Furthermore, when compared to other students in the City, middle school Summer Rising participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days actually fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group. DOE's own impact analysis supports our findings that Summer Rising is not the appropriate model for all middle school youth.

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child's preference, but most low-income families are reliant on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement.

There exist a number of respected summer programming models that be used as a basis for alternative models, including:

- COMPASS Summer: DYCD funds community-based and Cornerstone programs to operate non-Summer Rising programming during summer months. This model reflects school-year programming and includes field trips, physical activity, leadership development, and integrated academics.

- Freedom Schools: This research-based and culturally sensitive program focuses on academics, civic engagement, family engagement, and social emotional learning. The training and model have been developed by the Children's Defense Fund.
- In addition, settlement houses operate a number of alternative summer models, including:
    - Life Lines Arts Camp: This program run by the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park engages youth in consistent group and community-building activities that promote social, physical, and artistic development. Campers attend a 5-day/week, full-day program and participate in enriching activities, including dance, theater, music, visual arts, and sports. Two full days per week are spent off-site on day trips.
    - Learning Campus Model: Henry Street Settlement operates this program as an extension of their school-year afterschool program, bringing together young people from two local community centers to participate in a club model. All students participate in academic sessions, but are given voice and choice to select enrichment activities, resulting in higher retention rates.

Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them. **The City must commit to funding alternative summer programming models to meet the diverse needs of NYC's youth and families.**

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at kconnolly@unhny.org.

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF LOCAL 372 | NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES
DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 | AFSCME
TO THE PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING ON EDUCATION
MARCH 23, 2026
9:30 PM

Education Committee Chairman Eric Dinowitz, and distinguished members of the City Council, I am Donald Nesbit, Executive President of Local 372 - NYC Board of Education Employees, District Council 37 | AFSCME. I am here today to provide testimony on the Mayor's proposed budget for education on behalf of the approximately 24,000 members we represent, including the 8,000 School Lunch Workers under the leadership of our President, Shaun D. Francois I.

Our members, such as School Lunch Workers, perform essential support services to help the 946,747 public school children of New York City to be learning-ready. School Lunch Workers unload, prepare, and serve food each day, including the summer. Not only is school lunch critical to a students health and well-being, especially for low-income students; it also ensures that students have the nutrition they need throughout the day to learn.

With the State providing funding for the Universal Free School Meals program, it is important that there is sufficient kitchen staff to service the restored menu. Local 372 respectfully requests that the City allocate **$10 million towards hiring an additional 1,000 School Lunch Workers**, bringing the total number in service up to 9,000. This will help reduce the strain on the current workforce while still continuing to fulfill the breakfast and lunch initiatives set by the previous and current administrations, including implementing more cooking from scratch, and

continuing to feed the children of New York City. In addition, this would allow the City to work quickly in replacing our members who are retiring and leaving their jobs.

School Lunch Workers must also be able to accomadate dietary restrictions, including medical or religious restrictions. With there being several enhanced school food programs to accomodate such restrictions, School Lunch Workers must follow multiple sets of strict guidelines to ensure our school children are eating safely. Additionally, we must also service the "Breakfast in the Classroom" program and prepare for lunch. Local 372 is extremely supportive of these programs, as well as universal lunch – every child deserves to come to class with a full stomach. However, in order for the school food programs to be successful and efficient, we need an additional 1,000 school lunch workers to make this possible and alleviate the strain they are already experiencing. With the current inadequate staffing levels, it makes it extremely difficulty for School Lunch Workers meet these requirements within work hours. These workers have to come to work earlier and stay later without extra compensation to simply make sure food is ready to feed nearly a million children across 1,600 schools when that bell rings.

Another struggle faced by our school lunch employees, which also has a direct impact on sanitation and hygiene in the school cafeterias and kitchens, is the inadequate air conditioning or ventilation. Updating the non-existent and inadequate cooling and air exchange systems in public schools kitchens has been a persistent struggle faced by School Lunch Workers for decades. The vast majority of schools built from the 1930s through the 1990s lack the proper design and operation for acceptable indoor air circulation. Due to the age and condition of these buildings, many lack the necessary electrical capabilities to simply install cool units in kitchen spaces. Many of these kitchens Local 372 workers are in every day have little to no cooling or ventilation and

can reach over 130 degrees! Proper air conditioning would filter out heat, fumes, and airborne pestilence.

A 2017 report titled “Too Hot to Learn,” detailed the significant lack of air conditioning. Former Mayor Bill de Blasio and other City officials rallied their support to install air conditioning in teaching spaces. That same energy and leadership is needed to support the health and safety of thousands of School Lunch Workers. We thank former Council Members Treyger, Kallos, and current member Yeger for recognizing this fact and introducing Resolution 1145-2019, calling on the Department to install air conditioning or cooling systems in New York City public school kitchens. Local 372 requests that the DOE and the SCA to comprehensively evaluate the school system’s outstanding kitchen ventilation needs throughout all five boroughs, and we request more funding be allocated towards a remediation plan pursuant to that evaluation.

In closing, Local 372 extends its gratitude to the City Council for your support to our members. We hope you support our request for $10 million to support School Lunch staffing and additional resources to remediate their working conditions. On behalf of Local 372, NYC Board of Education, District Council 37 | AFSCME, I thank you for this opportunity to testify.

NEW YORK CITY CHARTER SCHOOL CENTER

It's about great public schools.

The New York City Charter School Center
Erik Joerss, Vice President of Advocacy and Government Affairs
Testimony Presented to the Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Education Committee
New York City Council City Council: Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2025

The New York City Charter School Center (Charter Center) respectfully submits the following testimony. The Charter Center thanks the New York City Council Committee on Education for providing the opportunity to comment on the Preliminary Executive Budget Hearings on behalf of students attending New York City charter schools.

For over twenty-five years, public charter schools have been an integral part of the public education system in New York City (NYC). In the 2025-26 school year there are 285 public charter schools operating in the five boroughs serving over 150,000 students. This represents 16% of public-school students, of which nearly 90% are Black/African American or Latinx. New York's public charter schools are serving primarily low-income NYC families (83% are economically disadvantaged), offering additional high-quality educational options for families.[1]

District-Charter Partnership presents an important opportunity to strengthen collaboration across NYC's public school system for the benefit of all students. Both district and charter schools educate NYC children, yet too often operate in silos without the ability to consistently share best practices, programming, and resources. Restarting and expanding NYC Public School's District-Charter Collaboration program, originally launched under Chancellor Fariña in partnership with the Charter Center is not only valuable, but essential, as both sectors continue to serve many of the city's most vulnerable students.

This initiative has the opportunity to foster meaningful relationships and facilitate the sharing of effective strategies across schools, resulting in tangible benefits for students. Relaunching and fully funding this work would expand access to proven practices, help reduce achievement gaps, and increase program opportunities for public school students across NYC. It would also allow educators to collaborate on real-time challenges, develop solutions for historically underserved communities, and strengthen professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders in both sectors.

District-charter collaboration promotes innovation alongside accountability and supports a more unified public education system. By ensuring that effective practices are shared rather than isolated, this partnership advances equity and helps ensure that all public-school students regardless of whether they attend a district or charter school will benefit from the strongest possible educational opportunities and strengthen outcomes across the entire educational system.

When we invest in collaboration, we foster a stronger, more unified public education community where every New York City student can have the opportunity to succeed and contribute meaningfully to society.

We ask that you restart and expand the NYCPS's District- Charters Collaboration.

Testimony of the New York Civil Liberties Union[1]
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education
March 23, 2026

NYCLU
ACLU of New York

125 Broad Street
19th Floor
New York NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
nyclu.org

Donna Lieberman
Executive Director

Wendy Stryker
President

I. INTRODUCTION

The NYCLU, the New York State affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with eight offices and more than 90,000 members and supporters across the state. The NYCLU's mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles, rights and values embodied in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of the State of New York.

Protecting and expanding students' rights is a core component of our mission, and through our Education Policy Center, the NYCLU advocates for healthy school climate and equitable access to quality education for all students.

The NYCLU submits these comments to urge greater Council oversight of education technology ("EdTech") deployed in New York City Public Schools ("DOE/NYCPS"), particularly technology with surveillance capacity, given the snowballing scope, harms,[2] fiscal impact and potential for waste in this sector.

NYCPS—both individual schools and the central office—routinely procures controversial EdTech from for-profit, third-party vendors without adequately scrutinizing these systems' negative impact on teaching and learning, student privacy, or democratic engagement in public schools, or their ethical, legal, or technical implications. This tech greatly expands the presence of law enforcement in the lives of young people by transforming their learning environments into sites of control, censorship, and punishment. We urge the Council to leverage the budget process to bring much needed transparency and accountability to this area.

II. THE ELUSIVE NYCPS EDTECH ECOSYSTEM

The EdTech industry, including student surveillance, has grown into an over $3 billion ecosystem and has successfully shaped and controlled the narrative around its products.[3] Products evolve quickly as vendors compete for lucrative public contracts, including through marketing enhanced artificial intelligence ("AI") capabilities and adding features that are unlawful in New York such as biometric surveillance.[4] This

[1] Contact the Education Policy Center at schools@nyclu.org.
[2] Extensive research literature finds that students attending "high surveillance" schools are less likely to stay engaged in school and more likely to face exclusionary discipline and school pushout. (*See*, Juan Del Toro, Dylan B. Jackson, and Ming-Te Wang, "The Policing Paradox: Police Stops Predict Youth's School Disengagement Via Elevated Psychological Distress," Developmental Psychology (April 2022), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9465843/; *See also,* Odis Johnson and Jason Jabbari, "Infrastructure of social control: A multi-level counterfactual analysis of surveillance and Black education," Journal of Criminal Justice, (September 2022), https://hub.jhu.edu/2022/09/21/school-surveillance-security/.)
[3] *See,* Chad Marlow, Emily Greytak, Katie Duarte, et. al, "Digital Dystopia: The Danger of Buying what the Edtech Industry is Selling," ACLU, (2023), https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/legaldocuments/digital_dystopia_report_aclu.pdf.
[4] *See, for example*, Federal Trade Commission, "FTC Takes Action Against Evolv Technologies for Deceiving Users About its AI-Powered Security Screening Systems", (November 26, 2024), https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2024/11/ftc-takes-action-against-evolv-technologies-deceiving-users-about-its-ai-powered-security-screening.

marketplace is vast, spanning video surveillance cameras, object and facial detection, behavior detection and monitoring, device and communication monitoring software, recording devices, and online monitoring and web filtering.

Much of this infrastructure is obtained through procurement processes that lack meaningful community engagement or oversight. Not only is it difficult for school community members to decipher or access the rooms where purchasing decisions are made, but they are forced to play catch-up as they arrive at school to encounter invasive products already in use. Often even the principals and IT staff making the purchasing recommendations have an incomplete understanding of the products and services they buy.

a. School Surveillance Cameras

The School Construction Authority ("SCA") Capital Plan presents to the public a $150 million "Safety and Security Program" for "state-of-the-art security technology" with remarkable absence of detail. This presents significant barriers for the public to learn about and scrutinize the SCA and third-party vendors.[5]

When NYCPS/DOE began the Internet Protocol Digital Video Surveillance ("IPDVS") capital improvement project in FY2005, the intent was to monitor students "so that school administrators and School Safety Agents ("SSAs") can identify and take preemptive measures against potentially problematic situations, such as student loitering."[6] Today there are more than 43,000 camera views online, both live and archiving camera images of students[7] and weaponized against young people to investigate and punish everyday infractions of school rules.[8]

In the proposed plan for FY2025-2029, the SCA will continue installing IPDVS, including an estimated 150 to 200 sites that will receive a "complete technical refresh, including the replacement of their current cameras that are no longer supportable with the latest digital cameras that provide much greater resolution and viewing clarity than those previously deployed."[9] Short on details, the public relies on Council budget oversight to shine a brighter light on the technical capabilities of these new camera models, the actual capital costs, and the vendors behind these systems.

b. Weapons Detection Systems

---

[5] School Construction Authority, "DoED February 2026 Five-Year Capital Plan – Proposed Plan – February 2026", http://nycsca.org/Community/Capital-Plan-Reports-Data.

[6] NYC Department of Education Division of Instructional & Information Technology, "NYC DOE DIIT School Standards", https://publicdata.usac.org/SL/Prd/Form470/402282/250026691/Appendix%20I%20%20NYC%20DOE%20DIIT%20School%20Standards%20v7.1.pdf.

[7] School Construction Authority, supra note at 4.

[8] Researchers have found the presence of cameras can heighten students' fear for their safety at school while evoking perceptions that they deserve to be surveilled (*See,* Sarah Lindstrom Johnson, Jessika Bottiani, Tracy E. Waasdorp, et. al., "Surveillance or Safekeeping? How School Security Officer and Camera Presence Influence Students' Perceptions of Safety, Equity, and Support," Journal of Adolescent Health (December 2018), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30197197/); The National Association of School Psychologists cautions schools citing the impact of surveillance on student wellness (*See*, "Research Summaries: School Security Measures and Their Impact on Students," National Association of School Psychologists (2018), https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Research%20Center/School_Security_Measur es_Impact.pdf).

[9] School Construction Authority, supra note at 4.

NYCLU
ACLU of New York

125 Broad Street
19th Floor
New York NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
nyclu.org

Donna Lieberman
Executive Director

Wendy Stryker
President

The FY2027 Preliminary Budget proposes a NYCPS/DOE contract with the NYPD of $387,484,536, an increase of $15,462,854 from the FY26 Modified Budget.[10, 11] This contract includes $4,903,848 in OTPS spending within the NYPD School Safety Division ("SSD"), which, under the category of "equipment general" (budgeted for $2,027,000) includes contracts for policing technology like metal detection equipment. Also, of note here: SSD OTPS was utilized to purchase the surveillance tool from *SaferWatch* from 2023-2024 that rolled out without Council oversight and the purchase of which was at the center of a federal investigation.[12]

Spending on school metal detection equipment comes from both the NYPD SSD OTPS and SCA capital projects, making the entire sum difficult for the public to capture. Students have attempted to use the Council's budget oversight process and Panel for Educational Policy's ("PEP") annual adoption of the Capital Plan amendments as a forum to voice their concerns, while recognizing decisions so often fall outside of such venues.

In December 2023, for example, then-Mayor Adams announced a new model of school metal detectors approved by the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget ("OMB"), through vendor *CEIA USA*,[13] where the city would replace scanners at 79 full-time scanning schools and 9 random scanning schools,[14] at a cost of $4 million.[15] To date, the NYPD SSD continues to pay CEIA for equipment and data processing supplies to operate these machines.[16] At the same time, school staff and students report routine dysfunction with the new equipment, and there has been no formal public engagement.

It has historically been rare for metal detector contracts to come before the PEP, and students most impacted have been largely shut out of the conversation on the efficacy of this school policing equipment. In one circumstance, in April 2025, NYCPS leveraged the "emergencies" exception[17] to PEP approval policy and procedures, where an "emergency contract" was presented to the PEP for the expedited procurement of 15 x-ray and magnetometer scanning devices.[18] The contract was retroactive and implemented prior to approval by the PEP, as the scanners were already in schools by the time the PEP voted and members of the public spoke out at

[10] NYC Office of Management and Budget, "February 2026 Departmental Estimates, Fiscal Year 2027", https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/feb26/de2-26.pdf.
[11] The FY26 Adopted Budget for this contract was $372,444,845. *See,* NYC Office of Management and Budget, "Supporting Schedule", https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/adopt25/ss6-25.pdf.
[12] *See*, Alex Zimmerman, "NYPD plans to launch a school hotline for safety and mental health issues. Advocates are wary," Chalkbeat New York, (October 26, 2023), https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2023/10/26/23933889/nypd-school-tip-line-safety-mental-health-saferwatch-police/; *See also,* Greg B. Smith, "Ex-NYPD Official Indicted for Accepting Bribes From Tech Exec in Scheme First Reported by THE CITY," THE CITY, (February 12, 2026), https://www.thecity.nyc/2026/02/12/kevin-taylor-phil-david-terence-banks-saferwatch-indictment/.
[13] NYC Office of the Mayor, "Transcript: Mayor Adams Holds In-Person Media Availability", (December 12, 2023), https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2023/12/transcript-mayor-adams-holds-in-person-media-availability-december-12.
[14] Cayla Bamberger, "NYC beefing up school security with new safety agents, high-tech scanners", Daily News, (December 14, 2023), https://www.nydailynews.com/2023/12/14/nyc-beefing-up-school-security-with-new-safety-agents-high-tech-scanners/.
[15] Capital Contracts to CEIA USA resulting from the announcement amounted to $4,008,636.00, per information reported by checkbook.nyc.
[16] Per information reported by checkbook.nyc.
[17] NYC Department of Education, "Procurement Policy & Procedures" (Section 3-09), https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/departmentofeducationprocurementpolicyandprocedures.pdf.
[18] *See, "*Contracts Agenda for the Meeting of the Panel for Educational Policy – Wednesday, April 30, 2025", https://www.schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/data/final-contracts-agenda5d08a47e-849c-4708-bede-09b01c30a9ed.pdf?sfvrsn=481d60bc_1.

the meeting—the contract with *Smiths Detection* was prepared and the check was issued in December 2024, months before it was presented to the public on the contracts agenda.[19]

c. Student Activity Monitoring EdTech

Of the exemptions from PEP contract approval authority is where the contract is made directly by an individual school.[20] According to the Special Commissioner of Investigation's review of school-level procurement procedures rules violations, procurement by DOE/NYCPS at the school level totaled $386 million for Fiscal Year 2025—demonstrating tremendous potential for waste.[21] Many contracts for student monitoring products, including those with the potential for serious harm, move through this route. As a result, spending on specific products is allowed to accumulate across the system but the products and contracts escape public oversight.

As an example of a disconcerting product growing in popularity, individual schools are increasingly contracting for electronic hall pass products[22] that monitor, track, and store data on student movement within the school building, constrain student bathroom use, and surveil and scrutinize student friend groups in the name of "encounter prevention" by utilizing "AI-powered detected encounters."[23] Strictly monitored limits on time spent out of the classroom mean that some students suffer unnecessary discipline consequences for cutting class, being late, and other code infractions.

Another rapidly expanding EdTech market is vape detectors[24] as vendors compete for settlement funds denoted for student vaping enforcement—$15 million of which recently went to NYCPS.[25] This tech is known for flooding admin with erroneous alerts, whereby school police are nonetheless deployed to patrol bathrooms and locker rooms, escalating conflict while neglecting to address the root causes of why students vape.[26] Alarmingly, competition within this market means vendors are expanding their dubious claims to include AI-enhancements,[27] "aggression" and "bullying" detection, listening devices, and cellphone detection capabilities.[28]

---

[19] Referencing Emergency Declaration Appendix A, Smiths Detection Equipment Proposal; *See also,* checkbook.nyc for vendor Smiths Detection Inc. under the School Construction Authority.
[20] NYC Department of Education, supra note 17 (Section 2-08 Panel for Educational Policy Approval).
[21] The Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District, "Re: SCI Review of DOE School-Level Procurement Procedures Rules Violations SCI Case #: 2024-05956", (December 30, 2025), https://nycsci.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/202405956_Procurement.pdf.
[22] See example NYCPS contracts for: SmartPass, Securly, Minga, Raptor, GoGuardian, and Navigate360.
[23] *See* SmartPass, "Encounter Prevention: Prevent two or more students from being the hallways at the same time," https://articles.smartpass.app/en/articles/6856238-encounter-prevention.
[24] See example NYCPS contracts for: Triton Sensors, Zeptive, and IPVideo Corporation.
[25] NYC Office of the Mayor, "Transcript: Mayor Adams, Attorney General James Announce $27 Million Coming To New York City To Combat Youth Vaping Epidemic", (June 12, 2024), https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2024/06/transcript-mayor-adams-attorney-general-james-27-million-coming-new-york-city-to.
[26] See, for example, Talia Richman, "MCPS vape sensors bombarded administrators with false alarms", The Baltimore Banner, (September 17, 2025), https://www.thebanner.com/education/k-12-schools/mcps-vape-sensors-IEAWKYO67FCJZIR4DMSLNANWEU/.
[27] See, for example, *FlySense* by *Soter Technologies* markets an "AI-powered vape and bullying detector", https://www.sotertechnologies.com/flysense-fs300/.
[28] See, for example, *Triton Sensors* alleges "patented sensor to detect cell phone use and policy evasion", https://www.tritonsensors.com/cell-phone-detection.

A community member looking to understand the cost of an EdTech product to their school's budget would open the Galaxy Allocation and see only terms like "Educational Software" without further detail.

Third-party vendors must agree to comply with federal, state, and local laws, the NYCPS Data Privacy and Security Policies, and the NYCPS Parent Bill of Rights for Data Privacy and Security, and complete a questionnaire to provide more information to parents, students, and the public about data security practices. But this process too is flawed. NYCPS directs parents to contact their school principal if they would like to know which vendor(s) the school uses or partners with.[29] In recent tests of this process, parents frequently are themselves questioned or receive incomplete and disjointed responses. The opportunity is ripe for the Council to advance transparency in EdTech, about which students, educators, parents and families have significant questions.

NYCLU
ACLU of New York

125 Broad Street
19th Floor
New York NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
nyclu.org

Donna Lieberman
Executive Director

Wendy Stryker
President

d. Chromebooks & Student Device Monitoring EdTech

At the end of 2025, the City committed to paying upwards of $320 million for 350,000 LTE-connected[30] Chromebooks, after the PEP authorized the Chromebooks contract that June; among the top five master agreements held by NYCPS/DOW is with vendor *CDW Government LLC* to provide Chromebooks.[31] Layered onto this school-issued tech is AI-powered student device monitoring through contracts with controversial vendors like *GoGuardian* and *Securly*. These products function as Chromebook-scanning spyware: software that surveils "all student activity across email, documents, social media, and web browsing,"[32] flagging students for discipline and notifying law enforcement of certain content.[33] In a highly reported incident in Arizona, for example, software vendor *Gaggle* used AI keystroke monitoring software to flag typed but deleted text on the school-issued Chromebook, resulting in a student's suspension.[34]

These products, by design, collect extensive details about students' lives, exposing the most intimate details to DOE/NYCPS and commercial vendors in suspect ways.[35]

---

[29] Referencing "Supplemental Information for Parents About DOE Agreements With Outside Entities", https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/policies/data-privacy-and-security-policies/supplemental-information-for-parents-about-doe-agreements-with-outside-entities/vendors-a-h.
[30] *See* Zachary Groz, "Inside Eric Adams's School Chromebook Spending Spree", New York Focus, (December 22, 2025), https://nysfocus.com/2025/12/22/eric-adams-school-chromebooks-contract.
[31] Per information reported by checkbook.nyc.
[32] *See,* Securly, "Make sure no student slips through the cracks", https://www.securly.com/respond.
[33] *See, for example*, Mark Keierleber, "Survey Reveals Extent that Cops Surveil Students Online — in School and at Home," The 74 (August 3, 2022), https://www.the74million.org/article/survey-reveals-extent-that-cops-surveil-students-online-in-school-and-at-home/.
[34] *See, for example,* Sam Dingman, "A Tucson high schooler got suspended when AI caught him typing — and then deleting — a joke," KJZZ, (August 18, 2025), https://www.kjzz.org/the-show/2025-08-18/a-tucson-high-schooler-got-suspended-when-ai-caught-him-typing-and-then-deleting-a-joke.
[35] Chad Marlow, Emily Greytak, Katie Duarte, et. al, *supra note* 3.

Third-party databases bring with them the possibility for data breaches of sensitive information[36] and invasive surveillance by law enforcement.[37]

Given the alarming and largely unknown capabilities of this software at play, we urge the Council to use the budget oversight process to shine a light on NYCPS policy and procurement decisions—particularly by encouraging NYCPS to articulate the defined needs that schools are looking to the private surveillance sector to solve, by examining research and testing of the products, and by pushing NYCPS to enact better guardrails for student privacy.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Condition Department of Education Funds on AI EdTech Transparency

As schools increasingly adopt AI-enabled technologies with little transparency or oversight, the Council can advance a comprehensive public audit of AI tools currently in use as a step towards providing families and students with accessible information and opportunities to question or opt out of these systems. Features of AI-enabled tools such as predictive policing, performance prediction algorithms, geolocation and social connection tracking, and student device monitoring have the capacity to turn students' digital footprints into punitive discipline and police interventions—opening the door to a new digitalized school-to-prison pipeline.[38] The harms are not evenly shared, as the research shows that these tools disproportionately target and push out Black youth, youth with disabilities, immigrant youth, and LGBTQ+ youth.[39]

Over the past several months, resolutions have been approved across Community Education Councils ("CECs") in part advocating that (a) parents should be informed of any use of AI that collects data about students and (b) parents should be given the right to informed consent and to opt their children out of the use of AI that collects their student's information.[40]As of December 4, 2024, vendors are required to adhere to additional AI-related standards, including that any AI technologies must be disclosed to NYCPS/DOE.[41] When going through the data privacy and security compliance process, vendors must disclose any use of AI technologies in their products and services.[42]

---

[36] *See,* for example, "Data Security Incidents with PowerSchool and Illuminate Education", https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/policies/data-privacy-and-security-policies/data-security-incidents; *See also,* Order on Consent and Administrative Settlement (New York State Education Department Enforcement Action against *Raptor Technologies*), https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/data-privacy-security/raptor-technologies-ooc.pdf.

[37] *See, for example,* Mark Keierleber, "ICE Taps into School Security Cameras to Aid Trump's Immigration Crackdown, 74 Investigation Finds", The 74, (February 10, 2026), https://www.the74million.org/article/ice-taps-into-school-security-cameras-to-aid-trumps-immigration-crackdown-74-investigation-shows/.

[38] *See* Clarence Okoh, "AI is supercharging child surveillance and the school-to-prison pipeline", The Hill, (November 21,2023), https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/4319035-ai-is-supercharging-child-surveillance-and-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/.

[39] *Id.; See, also,* Odis Johnson, Jason Jabbari, "Infrastructure of social control: A multi-level counterfactual analysis of surveillance and Black education", Journal of Criminal Justice, Volume 83, (2022), 101983, ISSN 0047-2352, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2022.101983.

[40] *See, for example,* "CEC22 Resolution in Support of AI Caution", (Approved March 3, 2026), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s5PhWZ-OUtwNvmEUH3W_w0SmbJJJyY8I/view.

[41] Referencing "Data Privacy and Security Compliance Process", https://infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/policies/data-privacy-and-security-compliance-process#aipolicies.

[42] *Id.*

We urge the Council to incorporate new Terms and Conditions requiring NYCPS/DOE to submit reporting to the Council, disaggregated also by school DBN, providing information on the number, contract ID, and value of contracts entered into, renewed, or extended, and the name of vendors selected pursuant to these contracts, for the previous school year, where the vendor utilizes artificial intelligence features in their products and services.

b. Reject Introduction 0327-2026

The NYCLU has previously testified against the passage of Introduction 327 and any expansion of the non-public school security guard reimbursement program.[43] One of our concerns is the budgetary implications of this proposal, as program expansion may pull millions more from the General Fund.[44] As written, this proposal, covering the costs of the purchase and installation of cameras, potentially for over 500 currently eligible schools, will fall well beyond the council's estimate.[45] For this reason and more, we again urge the Council to reject this legislation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Without question, the tremendous and yet untold sum of city spending on surveillance EdTech requires more oversight. The absence of transparency and accountability has enabled secretive decision-making, irresponsible contracting, and the de facto exclusion of parent and student participation in municipal and school budgeting.

Schools are increasingly turning to surveillance EdTech as a false solution, often with little evidence, oversight, or efficacy. We urge the Council to use its influence this budget cycle to bring harmful and misguided city spending to light and support students, families, and educators looking for real answers from decision makers.

NYCLU
ACLU of New York

125 Broad Street
19th Floor
New York NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
nyclu.org

Donna Lieberman
Executive Director

Wendy Stryker
President

[43] NYCLU, "Testimony to New York City Council Committee to Combat Hate Regarding Intros 001-A, 175-A, 327, and 388", (February 25, 2026), https://www.nyclu.org/resources/policy/testimonies/testimony-to-new-york-city-council-committee-to-combat-hate-regarding-intros-001-a-175-a-327-and-388.

[44] There are discrepancies between the Council's Int 0327-2026 Fiscal Impact Statement [The Council of the City of New York Finance Division, "Fiscal Impact Statement Int. No: 327", (Date Prepared: February 4, 2026), https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15272276&GUID=F6E7C19E-3DC2-4BB1-89FF-C604D4D53600] and the Council's Int 0532-2024 Fiscal Impact Statement [The Council of the City of New York Finance Division, "Fiscal Impact Statement Proposed Int. No: 532-A", (Date Prepared: December 13, 2024), https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=13634297&GUID=34CD5C11-254A-49BB-A6D7-4CB9DA3D9DC1]. While the Int 0327 statement claims, "Although the legislation would expand the scope of reimbursable costs to include security cameras, the legislation would not amend the amount of funds appropriated for the reimbursement program, which total $35,000,000," the legislation's $35M funding maximum refers to "subdivision b" or the "Nonpublic school security guard reimbursement program," separate and apart from subdivision "n" for "video surveillance cameras." Further, the Int 0532-2024 statement projects the cost of expanding the security guard reimbursement program would amount of $16,322,303 on top the existing annual expenditure of the program pursuant to Local Law 2 of 2016 establishing the program of $18,521,931 – amounting to a total of $34,844,234.

[45] *Id.*

newyorkedge.org

NYC Council FY 27
Preliminary Budget Hearings –

Children & Youth Committee
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

Education Committee
Hon. Eric Dinowitz, Chair

Health Committee
Hon. Lynn Schulman, Chair

Submitted by Rachael Gazdick, CEO

On behalf of **New York Edge (NYE)**, thank you for the Council's long-standing support of our mission of bridging the opportunity gap among students in underinvested communities.

New York Edge is New York City's longest-standing and largest school-based provider of afterschool and summer programming, serving almost 33,000 students across 134 schools in 37 of the 51 Council Districts, including 4 Beacon Centers and 21 Community Schools. We also operate 4 food pantries in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. We proudly offer culturally responsive programming rooted in academic enrichment, sports, health & wellness, visual and performing arts, STEM, leadership and college & career readiness – with social emotional learning intentionally woven throughout everything we do.

Our testimony today is in support of Universal After-School and in support of our FY 27 citywide funding requests.

With the city moving forward with Universal Childcare we must also look to implementing Universal After-School as these go hand in hand in helping working families and in providing a true continuum of care and academic supports children of all ages.

For over three decades, the New York City Council has been a vital partner in helping us to fulfill our mission. Council citywide funding has enabled us to enrich and expand our programming throughout the city and has allowed us to develop and implement unique and engaging programs.

Since 2020, we have tripled in size and have significantly increased the number of students served. Our Council citywide funding, however, has remained flat at $1M. My team and I ask for your help and support as we seek increased funding in the upcoming budget in alignment with this growth and in alignment with our impact and scale:

- **$1.5M under the Council's After-School Enrichment Initiative - an increase of $500,000 over our FY 26 allocation.**

- **$250,000 under the Council's Social & Emotional Supports for Students Initiative. We are, as identified by Mosaic by ACT, the largest afterschool provider in the nation providing SEL supports.**

New York Edge was created 34 years ago at the suggestion of the New York City Council to provide free wrap-around summer camps for youth attending summer school. At that time such camps, which provided sports and arts activities as well as academic help, did not exist. With the Council as its partner, New York Edge was at the forefront of the movement to provide free summer camp programming to our city's youth.

Our Education Team, comprised of educators with expertise in curriculum, professional coaching, and program development with a focus on leadership, integrated technologies, literacy and STEAM, take learning beyond the traditional classroom walls. **Core components of New York Edge programming include:**

- **STEM Education**
- **Social Emotional Learning and Leadership**
- **Visual & Performing Arts**
- **Sports, Health & Wellness**
- **Academics and College & Career Readiness**
- **Summer Programs**

Through its partnership and support, the Council is helping young New Yorkers discover their interests, their passions, and their joys, building pathways to careers and trades that will provide financial security throughout their lives – and in the process creating connections to each other, to teachers, mentors, and their communities. **Together, we are guiding students so that they grow up healthy, happy and empowered. Together, we are creating the next generation of active and productive community members and problem solvers. Together, we are creating New York City's next generation of doctors, mechanics, chefs, writers, engineers, entrepreneurs and so much more.**

The proof of our success and impact is in our numbers:

- **98% of school principals would recommend New York Edge;**
- **96% of New York Edge parents say that New York Edge programming prepares their child for success;**
- **80% of school principals see stronger SEL behaviors (leadership, decision-making, goal setting) in their students as a result of New York Edge programming.**

Our success is due to the New York Edge Difference:

- **A Whole Child Approach;**
- **Prioritizing Social & Emotional Learning;**
- **High-Quality Curriculum;**
- **Close Partnership with School Leadership and Parents;**
- **Flexibility & Adaptability;**
- **Capacity & Infrastructure;**
- **Experienced, Culturally Competent Staff.**

All of us at New York Edge are proud to serve New York City's K-12 students of all ages, races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our offerings are culturally relevant programs, tailored to students' needs and interests, and rooted in social-emotional learning. **SEL is integrated into every element of our programming.**

Our model for aiding social emotional learning includes robust academic and personal wellness support, and trauma-informed strategies. We blend the critical elements that support an appreciation of cultural diversity with the core SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, social capital and decision-making into all academic curriculum and extracurricular activities. **We are, as identified by Mosaic by ACT, the largest after-school provider in the nation offering SEL supports.**

New York Edge school-based programs run before or after the school day, year-round (including Saturdays, over the summer, and holiday periods). City Council citywide funding has enabled New York Edge to enrich and expand our school year and summer programs and provide students with opportunities that expose them to real-world experiences and major stages.

Through this support, students participate in innovative programs such as our award-winning student-led podcast Formative, our Book Publishing Program, Read Across New York Edge, our Music Industry Program with **Republic Records**, creative technology experiences through our Animation Studio and Makers Club, our ballet dance program inspired by **Misty Copeland**, and culinary learning through collaboration with **Jamie Oliver** and the Food Explorers program. These are just a few examples of how City Council support allows us to bring high-quality, engaging opportunities to thousands of young people across New York City.

Our programs are designed to put young people on the biggest stages and in real-world environments so they can see what is possible for their future. New York Edge students perform at **Radio City Music Hall** and compete in flag football championships at **MetLife Stadium**. These experiences help our students see themselves as the next generation of leaders, athletes, artists, and innovators, expanding their vision for what they can achieve in school and in life.

Funding under the ***Social & Emotional Supports for Students*** Initiative will enable us to support our current SEL programming providing high quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning assessments, curriculum and resources to all of our partner schools, the students we serve and their families. At New York Edge, social-emotional learning helps students feel a real sense of belonging and connection. When students feel safe and supported, they are more confident participating in class and in afterschool programs.

Our programs help students build positive peer relationships and learn how to work through conflicts in healthy ways. This creates a more respectful environment where students can focus on learning. SEL helps students develop self-awareness and emotional regulation, giving us

tools to manage stress, frustration, and challenges that can otherwise distract us from our schoolwork. Through our programs, students build motivation and engagement in learning, which leads to better attendance, stronger participation, and improved academic performance.

New York Edge, its students, and families are extraordinarily grateful for the Council's past support. **The time has come, however, where increased funding is vitally needed.** Unlike contracts with DYCD and other agencies, Council discretionary contracts are not (and have never been) eligible for COLA increases. This is making it increasingly difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality staff and to continue to offer the wide array of STEM, SEL, Visual & Performing Arts, Sports, Health & Wellness and College & Career Readiness programs that we are known for.

We are now looking to you to meet the needs of the next generation of young people by supporting our FY 27 citywide funding requests. **These funds will enable us to keep providing youth throughout the city with the edge they need to succeed!**

Thank you.

58-12 Queens Blvd, Suite 1, Woodside, NY 11377 | TEL. 718.786.7110 | FAX 718.205.1098

New York City Council

Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2027

BUDGET AND OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Testimony of New York Immigration Coalition

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee, for convening this hearing. My name is Yasmin Naji, I am a product of New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the child of immigrant parents, a constituent of the 11th City Council District, and I serve as the Manager of Education Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC). The NYIC is a statewide network of more than 200 organizations that support immigrants and refugees across New York State. For more than 30 years, the NYIC has worked to expand educational access and opportunity for immigrant students.

We also convene the Education Collaborative, a coalition of more than 30 organizations representing the diversity of New York's immigrant communities, including legal advocates, educators, policy experts, and community-based organizations working directly with English Language Learners (ELLs) and immigrant families.

Today, I am here to discuss urgent budget priorities for ELLs and immigrant students in New York City schools. In the 2024–2025 school year, more than 1 in 6 students in NYCPS was identified as an ELL. These students are not only a significant part of our school system, they are central to the future of New York City as the next generation of leaders and workers.

Immigrant students strengthen our schools and communities. Research consistently shows that classrooms with immigrant students improve academic outcomes for all students. A 2023 study published in the *Review of Economic Studies* found that greater exposure to

immigrant peers is associated with improved math and reading outcomes among U.S.-born students. Immigrant students also enrich classrooms by bringing new languages, cultures, and global perspectives that strengthen cross-cultural understanding and school communities. Immigrant students have also helped stabilize enrollment across New York City schools. Between 2022 and 2024, approximately 48,000 newly arrived students enrolled in NYCPS. Their enrollment provided critical stability for schools experiencing declines and helped sustain funding for those schools.

Yet today, immigrant students face two interconnected challenges that the City must address: ensuring that immigrant students feel safe attending school and ensuring that they receive the high-quality education they are legally entitled to.

Schools are often the first government institutions immigrant families interact with. Schools are high-touch, high-trust institutions. Yet today, many families are experiencing uncertainty and fear about whether schools are safe spaces. During the current 2025–2026 school year, overall NYCPS has enrollment declined by approximately 2 percent. At the same time, the 60 schools that received the largest numbers of newly arrived students collectively lost 11 percent of their enrollment, with some individual schools experiencing declines of 30 to 40 percent. While NYCPS does not collect immigration status data that would explain these trends, NYIC member organizations, including schools and community-based organizations working directly with students, report that fear of immigration enforcement is a driving factor. Families are increasingly keeping children home from school, sometimes for days or weeks at a time, out of concern that their child may encounter immigration enforcement on the way to and from school, while in the classroom, on school trips, or when engaging in extracurricular activities. Even when enforcement actions occur outside of school grounds, the detention of immigrant students creates a chilling effect across entire school communities, reinforcing fear and uncertainty for students and families.

Even short absences can significantly disrupt learning, particularly for ELL students who rely on consistent classroom instruction to build language and academic skills. In practice, fear of immigration enforcement is already contributing to increased absenteeism, as some families keep children home out of concern for their safety. These disruptions extend beyond academics. Family instability tied to enforcement actions can take a serious toll on students' mental health and well-being, leading to anxiety, withdrawal, and behavioral changes; with many students also taking on added responsibilities at home in the aftermath of raids. At the same time, NYIC member organizations report widespread confusion among schools and community partners about how to respond if immigration enforcement activity occurs near school buildings or while students are in their care.

Simultaneously, the quality of education available to ELL students remains deeply underfunded and inconsistently implemented. A recent audit of NYC schools found significant gaps in services for ELL students. Nearly half of ELLs did not receive the legally required courses or instructional minutes, and 40 percent were taught by teachers without the required certification. NYCPS also improperly used waivers to avoid establishing required bilingual education programs, disproportionately affecting Russian, Bengali, Arabic, Uzbek, and Haitian-Creole speaking communities. The audit further found that the Department failed to maintain records demonstrating that parents were informed of their rights in their preferred language.

While the City has made important investments to support newly arrived students, including launching Project Open Arms, distributing $27 million across more than 600 schools that welcomed newcomer students, and expanding bilingual programs during the 2023–2024 school year, significant gaps remain. In about half the schools that received this funding, there was still not a single bilingual educator available during that same school year.

This moment requires the City to strengthen both protections for immigrant students and investments in educational quality. The NYIC respectfully urges the City Council to support the following priorities:

First, the City Council should pass legislation requiring NYCPS to issue expanded guidance on interacting with non-local law enforcement as well as pass Intro 55. Current NYCPS guidance primarily addresses enforcement activity inside school buildings. Updated protocols should also address enforcement activity on school perimeters, during arrival and dismissal, on school transportation, and during off-campus school activities. The protocols should also outline shelter-in-place procedures while school leadership engages with non-local law enforcement. **The legislation should also require NYCPS to implement training so that every adult in every school understands how to respond to encounters with non-local law enforcement.** NYCPS should develop a training curriculum aligned with the updated guidance. The Chancellor should convene principals for centralized virtual training and require principals to facilitate staff training during existing professional development time. This training should occur at least annually, including at the start of each school year, and be incorporated into pre-service onboarding for all new staff. Training should also include School Safety Officers and contracted staff who work directly with students. The Council should also pass Intro 55, which would require clear, multilingual signage outlining individuals' rights when interacting with federal immigration authorities, helping ensure that students, families, and school staff understand existing protections.

Second, the City should commit $8 million to create an English Language Learner (ELL) Instructional Specialist position. This investment would create a pilot in 50 high-need schools, where specialists would help ensure that students receive grade-level instruction, required bilingual or ENL services, and appropriate academic interventions. The role would also strengthen family engagement by ensuring that ELL families understand their children's academic progress and their rights to language and academic support.

Third, the City should increase funding for the Support for Arts Instruction Initiative to $6 million. The current $4 million allocation supports 239 schools through partnerships in visual arts, music, dance, and theater. At a time when immigration enforcement is heightening stress and anxiety for many students, arts education plays an important role in supporting students' emotional well-being and sense of belonging. Expanding this initiative would extend access to more than 350 schools.

Fourth, the City should baseline $4 million for the Immigrant and Family Communications and Outreach Initiative, which is currently set to expire in June 2026. This initiative strengthens communication with immigrant families through trusted community-based organizations, multilingual materials, access to interpretation services, and targeted outreach to ensure families receive timely and accurate information about their schools.

Finally, the City should direct $800 million in the Capital Plan to address urgent health and safety hazards in school buildings with the greatest needs. Many schools have failing facility conditions and face hazards including asbestos, mold, and outdated or unreliable heating and cooling systems. Targeted investments in the highest-need schools would reduce absenteeism and improve learning conditions, particularly for Black, Latino, and immigrant students.

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July: Learning to Work ($31 million); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12 million); infant/toddler child care seats ($10 million); restorative justice ($6 million); the Mental Health Continuum ($5 million); early childhood education outreach ($5 million); and Student Success Centers ($3.3 million), as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

At a moment when immigrant communities across the country are facing heightened uncertainty, it is critical that New York City reaffirm its commitment to immigrant students. Supporting immigrant students requires a two-part commitment. Students must feel safe walking into a school building, and once they enter the classroom, they must receive the high-quality education they deserve. New York City cannot choose between these priorities. We must do both.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Yasmin Naji

Manager of Education Policy

New York Immigration Coalition

NYLPI
JUSTICE THROUGH COMMUNITY POWER

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc.
151 West 30th Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001-4017
Tel 212-244-4664 Fax 212-244-4570
www.nylpi.org

Testimony of Michelle Kraus, Manager of Social Work and Intake Services on behalf of The Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest before The New York City Council Committee on Education regarding The New York City FY27 Budget

March 23, 2026

My name is Michelle Kraus, and I am a social worker in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Council, for the opportunity to testify today. I want to focus on students whose needs are urgent and very real, those who rely on school not just for learning, but for stability, safety, and emotional support.

A six-year-old Latino student with the initials N.L., whose mother called our intake line, came home from his District 75 school with unexplained bruises, including injuries to his torso. When his mother went to the school for answers, the staff could not explain how the injuries happened, even though he had a one-on-one paraprofessional. Since then, he has been afraid to return to school, he wakes up in the middle of the night, and he has regressed significantly, both developmentally and emotionally. At the same time, his mother was receiving conflicting information about his learning and behavior. Teachers reported that N.L. was focused and was making progress, while at home, mom saw clear struggles with no academic growth. Previously, in a pre-K setting with appropriate behavioral support, he made strong progress—but those supports are no longer in place. Requests by mom for the return of those critical services, and for added services, have gone unanswered.

N.L.'s experience highlights what happens when mental health, behavioral support, and accountability systems are inconsistent or inadequately resourced for a child at such an early age. This path, so early on in NYC's special education system, forebodes an uncertain and harmful future for N.L.

There are between 7,000 and 10,000 students in NYC public schools classified as "emotionally disabled." [1] However, this number represents only a fraction of the students who need mental health support, as up to 40% of city high schoolers report feeling persistently sad or hopeless.[2] Most are Black and Brown children, often placed in segregated settings with poor academic and social outcomes.[3]

There is a clear lack of consistent, ongoing mental health and wraparound services.[4] While there have been recent investments, much of the funding is temporary or insufficient.[5] Students face long waitlists, limited access to care, or support that disappears just as trust is being built.[6] According to the NYC Comptroller,, 71% of schools do not meet the recommended ratio of one social worker for every 250 students, and 53% do not meet the recommended ratio of one guidance counselor for every 250 students.[7]

For these students, school should be a refuge—but too often, it falls short. Without strong, school-based clinical services, students face higher risks of not graduating, struggles in relationships with family and friends, and becoming involved in the criminal legal system. Mental health support cannot come and go, especially for vulnerable and underserved youth. It must be steady, built into the school system, and delivered by trained clinicians.

---

[1] New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *A Crisis in Special Education: New York City's Failure to Educate Students Classified with Emotional Disability, A Prposal for Systemic Change,* New York, New York (2023), https://www.nylpi.org/resource/a-crisis-in-special-education-new-york-citys-failure-to-educate-students-classified-with-emotional-disability-a-proposal-for-systemic-change/.

[2] Id.

[3] Id.

[4] Id.

[5] Id.

[6] Id.

[7] Office of the New York City Comptroller, "Classrooms, Counselors, Clinics: Building a Mental Health Care Continuum in New York City Public Schools," New York, New York (2025), https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Mental-Health-Services-in-NYC-Public-Schools.pdf.

Students need consistent, trusted adults who are present and available, culturally responsive, and able to build relationships over time.
If we believe schools should be safe spaces, we need to fund them that way.

We urge the Council to:

- prioritize stable, increased funding for school-based mental health services,
- invest in licensed clinicians,
- expand school-based clinics, and
- ensure that students have reliable support throughout the school year.

The FY 2026 Executive Budget allocated $8.2–8.6 million for school-based health centers, but this covers only 35 of 137 sites.[8] The NYC Comptroller estimates that at least $20 million more is needed to sustain current services and over $40 million to expand.[9] An added $5 million funds the Mental Health Continuum model, which serves thousands of students across 50 high-needs schools through clinic partnerships, dedicated staff, crisis response, and training.[10] However, this funding is set to expire in June 2026,[11] endangering access to these valuable services.
We also need greater transparency. Right now, it is difficult to understand which schools have services, what is available, how many students are served, and what outcomes are being achieved. Better data would improve planning, accountability, and trust. Students cannot learn or thrive if their mental health needs are unmet. This budget is an opportunity to move from short-term fixes to a real system of care.
NYLPI, through our work on the Transition Alliance—a dedicated coalition of organizations and individuals working to modernize and improve transition services for students with disabilities in New York City – is also greatly concerned about the significant service gap in "travel training." Currently administered through New York City Public Schools, travel training provides vital

[8] New York City Council, "New York City Council/Press Release," New York, New York (2025), https://council.nyc.gov/press/2025/05/23/2879/#:~:text=School%20Based%20Health%20Centers%20(SBHC,for%20students%20across%20450%20schools.
[9] Office of the City Comptroller, supra at note 8.
[10] Id.
[11] Id.

one-on-one instruction, teaching students with disabilities the technical skills and safety protocols required to navigate public transit between their homes and schools. Beyond transportation, this program is foundational to building the confidence and personal agency necessary for post-secondary independence.

To ensure these essential services reach more students across all five boroughs, NYLPI joins our fellow advocates in requesting that the City invest $2 million to expand travel training capacity. This investment is a critical step toward ensuring that every student with a disability has the tools to navigate our city safely and independently.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at (212) 244-4664 or MKraus@NYLPI.org, and I look forward to the opportunity to discuss how best to meet the mental health needs of students with disabilities in New York City and to share our recommendation that travel training is appropriately funded.

###

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

For 50 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) has been a leading civil rights advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status. Through our community lawyering model, we bridge the gap between traditional civil legal services and civil rights, building strength and capacity for both individual solutions and long-term impact. Our work integrates the power of individual representation, impact litigation, and comprehensive organizing and policy campaigns. Guided by the priorities of our communities, we strive to achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, create equal access to health care, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local nonprofits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to advance the civil rights of New Yorkers with disabilities. In the past five years alone, NYLPI disability advocates have represented thousands of individuals and won campaigns improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We prioritize protecting and promoting the educational rights of students with disabilities in New York City and have advocated on behalf of countless students. Our report, "A Crisis in Special Education: New York City's Failure to Educate Students Classified with 'Emotional

Disability,' A Proposal for Systemic Change," reveals systemic failures in New York City's public schools. Despite decades of legal protections, students classified with an "Emotional Disability" are being denied the equal access to education and support they deserve.
For more information visit: www.nylpi.org.

Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Education
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026

My name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Dinowitz, as well as members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to comment.

NYLCV's annual New York City top priorities include decarbonizing our transportation and building sectors. This is especially important to New York City's school buses and public school buildings, both of which are overwhelmingly fueled by fossil fuels, not only contributing to climate change but to harmful public health impacts such as asthma. **For FY27, NYLCV urges the City to fund the implementation of the City's zero emission school bus law and sustainably retrofit NYC public schools.**

Implement and Fund the NYC Zero Emission School Bus Law

According to the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, more than 11,000 NYC school buses transport 150,000 students to school each day. These buses run on diesel fuel, generating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that contribute to climate change. Electrifying school buses is important not only to help combat climate change, but to combat toxic air pollution, a longstanding environmental justice issue. Many school bus depots are located in EJ areas, and the exhaust from these buses harms schoolchildren. New York City students that take the school bus, many of whom are children with disabilities, face dangerous diesel exhaust exposure, which can lead to serious health implications such as asthma, which is one of the major causes of chronic absenteeism in NYC public schools.

Together with our partners on the New York City Clean School Bus Coalition and Council Members, NYLCV fought for the passage of Local Law 120 of 2021, mandating an all electric school bus (ESB) fleet by 2035 to cut harmful pollutants, improve public health and air quality, and fight climate change.

NYLCV applauds the City for continuing to be awarded federal and state electric school bus-related grants over the past couple of years. While the City has been awarded a few hundred ESBs as of 2024, few are on the road due to issues ranging from supply chain issues to a lack of citywide charging infrastructure. On top of this, with the uncertainty surrounding the

Trump Administration's pause on federal grants, we urge the City and State to work together to identify funding for ESB purchases, workforce development, and charging infrastructure.

NYLCV urges the City, specifically DOE, to fully commit to the timely implementation and funding of Local Law 120 of 2021. New York State law requires all new school bus purchases as of 2027 to be electric, with the entire fleet transitioned to electric by 2035, so it is incumbent on the City to prioritize the rollout of ESBs and charging infrastructure.

The City must work with school bus vendors and utility companies to plan, develop, and fund school bus charging infrastructure throughout the City, especially at school bus depots located in disadvantaged communities, and ESB workforce development programs since bus fleet personnel will require training for driving, properly maintaining EVs, and optimizing charging for electric bus routes, energy needs, and intra-day energy price fluctuations.

As stated in the Adams' Administration's *PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done* and *PowerUp NYC*, DOE should incorporate electrification requirements in the next contract renegotiation with school bus fleet vendors; implement lessons learned from vehicle-to-grid pilots; and launch a training program for ESB operations and maintenance and provide ongoing support. NYLCV appreciates that the City has committed to expanding ESB workforce development opportunities, as stated in the recently-published *Green Economy Action Plan,* and we hope the City will follow through by devoting funding to the development of these programs.

Additionally, the City must continue taking advantage of grant opportunities at the federal and state level. For instance, in March 2024, Governor Hochul announced funding available for electric school bus charging infrastructure under the historic $4.2 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act and through the New York School Bus Incentive Program.We urge the City to make progress in getting more ESBs on the road and investing in workforce development programs.

Fund NYC Schools Clean Energy Upgrades

The vast majority of NYC's GHG emissions come from our buildings. Making matters worse, many of the City's public schools are in older buildings that still run on fossil fuels, contributing to air pollution and poor indoor air quality. **For FY27, NYLCV is advocating for $2.2 billion for clean energy upgrades in NYC Public Schools. This includes solar installation on schools and electrification projects, insulation repairs and upgrades to HVAC systems, and exploring projects that utilize thermal energy networks.**

Moreover, as the previous administration stated in *PowerUp NYC*, the City should consider school retrofit projects as an educational and job training opportunity for students. For instance, placing solar infrastructure on schools provides a unique opportunity to teach students about clean energy and climate change and develop training pathways to well-paying green jobs.

In addition to sustainably retrofitting NYC schools to reduce emissions and improve air quality, the City must retrofit them holistically and take climate resiliency and adaptation into account.

According to data that the previous Comptroller's Office shared with City Limits, over a quarter of the city's public school buildings, 28 percent, are currently at risk of extreme stormwater flooding. Indeed, according to the Comptroller's Office, "by 2050, there will be 77 public schools facing a dual threat: at risk of being hit by 'high' intensity stormwater events—defined in the analysis as 3.5 inches of rain per hour—while also located on a floodplain that is vulnerable to coastal flooding."

NYLCV hopes the Mamdani Administration will continue working off of the previous *Leading the Charge* initiative, ensure funding is allocated in a timely manner, and go even further with the amount of schools that become fully electric. To the extent possible, the City must continue taking advantage of grant opportunities at the federal and state level, such as NYSERDA's $100 million Environmental Bond Act funding for the Clean Green Schools Initiative, which will help public schools that traditionally lack resources to invest in infrastructure improvements become healthier, more productive learning environments, such as reducing school energy loads, decarbonizing their building portfolio, improving indoor air quality (IAQ) and providing clean energy educational opportunities.

With the climate crisis regularly reminding us that it is here and not some future threat, NYLCV urges the City to fully commit to electrifying our City's school buses and invest in retrofitting our public schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

50 Broadway, 29th Floor
New York, NY 10004
www.alignny.org

Testimony for Committee on Education
Budget and Oversight Hearing on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 23, 2026

Board of Directors

Stuart Appelbaum
President, Retail Wholesale Department Store Union

Henry Garrido
Executive Director, AFSCME District Council 37

Alex Gleason
Policy and Campaigns Director, NYC Central Labor Council

Bernadette Kelly, Consortium for Worker Education

Eunice Ko
Deputy Director, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance

Olivia Leirer
Co-Director, New York Communities for Change

Juanita O. Lewis
Executive Director Community Voices Heard

Elizabeth Jordan
Co-Legal Director, Make the Road NY

Thank you to the Education Committee chair Council Member Dinowitz for the opportunity to submit written testimony today.

My name is Faiza Azam and I am the Climate and Labor Organizer for ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York. We bring together labor, climate, and community for a more just and sustainable New York. We co-coordinate the Climate Works for All Coalition—a group of labor, community, student, parent, faith, and environmental justice organizations fighting climate change and inequality in New York City. I am also a former NYC Public School student, an alumni of John Dewey High School which was devastated by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 going under emergency generators for over two years as a result.

Our school buildings have been underinvested in for years and lack the proper infrastructure to be resilient in our worsening climate crisis. From devastating flooding to extremely poor air quality caused by pollution and greenhouse gases, students, teachers, and faculty are often among those first impacted when climate disaster strikes. This not only interrupts learning, but creates a public safety issue for students, teachers and faculty.

ALIGN leads the Green, Healthy Schools campaign, which primarily focuses on decarbonizing public school buildings because we believe that NYC 3K-12 students, teachers, parents, and school staff deserve safe and healthy workplaces to work, learn and play regardless of their zip code.

We strongly urge the City to invest $2.2B this budget session to support clean energy upgrades beginning with the upgrading and electrifying schools with the schools most in need and centering those in environmental justice communities. Additionally, increasing the funds for this fiscal year and annually for the next 4 years will put New York City on a path to electrify and upgrade all 1200 school buildings by 2030, creating over 320,000 clean energy jobs and a net zero emissions school district by 2040.

This will save the City millions in climate disaster repairs by being proactive in investments and it will make New York a national leader in the transition to

a clean energy economy.

Over 75 organizations representing over 2 million New Yorkers have signed our budget letter to the Mayor and Speaker Menin with their support for Green, Healthy Schools. We look forward to working more with the Council to ensure our public school buildings receive the investment and care they deserve.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Faiza Azam

Testimony of the Alliance for Quality Education
at the NYC Council Hearing on the Education Budget
Monday March 23rd 2026

Good afternoon Chair Dinowitz and Education Committee members. My name is Zakiyah Shaakir-Ansari, I am the Co-Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE). AQE organizes parents statewide pushing for quality public education for all our children regardless of zip code.

ADVOCATE TO BOOST STATE AID FOR NYCPS

Although it is a state matter, we would be remiss not to note that we are in the final stretch of budget negotiations between the legislature and Governor to finalize the state budget, which contributes a significant amount of funding to NYCPS. We urge the New York City Council to advocate for NYCPS by calling on the state to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula on a per pupil funding basis and make long overdue changes. The formula was created in 2007 and is in dire need of updates in order to stay true to its purpose of accurately measuring the cost of education in each district. Last year's state budget included some limited changes to the Foundation Aid formula that left some districts, including New York City (-$314 million), receiving a smaller increase in funding than they would have received had the State made no changes to the formula at all. This change is due to an update to the poverty weight, which is based on the grossly inadequate federal poverty guidelines and measures poverty the same way in every school district across New York, even though costs vary significantly across the State.

Right now, Governor Hochul has NOT included any of the updates in her state budget that are long overdue to ensure that schools are getting enough resources to meet students' needs.

Last month, the IBO released a report showing the dollar amounts that would come to NYCPS if the Foundation Aid formula were updated by revising the Regional Cost Index (RCI), adding a weight for students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care, and increasing the weight for English Language Learners. It also shows that NYC schools would receive around

$250 million less under the FY27 Executive Budget proposal than they would have under the FY25 formula (assuming no changes had been made to the formula in FY26).

Fortunately just a few days ago, and for the first time, the Senate and Assembly one house proposals included increasing the weight for ELLs (both .6, up from 0.4) and adding a weight to account for students who are homeless and students in foster care, recognizing the needs of these students and the costs associated with serving them.

In these final weeks before the state budget is finalized, we ask that the NYC Council support advocates and community groups calling on Governor Hochul and state legislators to ensure the upcoming New York State budget fully funds the Foundation Aid formula and makes important updates to improve the formula itself, including updating the Regional Cost Index, increasing the weight for English Language Learners, and adding a weight for students in temporary housing or foster care.

We urge the Council to circulate a sign-on letter of support internally, to speak out about this in press conferences, and to join advocates in Albany in March to pressure the state to update the formula in the final hour of negotiations.

BASELINE CRITICAL SERVICES

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July – Learning to Work ($31M); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12M); infant/toddler child care seats ($10M); restorative justice ($6M); the Mental Health Continuum ($5M); early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M) – as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

FUND EFFORTS FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

We are also a part of the Integration Coalition consisting of advocates and organizations committed to addressing school segregation through a Real Integration framework and calling for a model of solidarity, not scarcity, across NYCPS. The coalition has identified a critical gap in the proposed education budget: the lack of dedicated investments to advance school

integration and inclusion across NYCPS, despite renewed commitments by both the Chancellor and the Mayor to address segregation in New York City's school system.

Specifically, we are calling for:

- **Baseline funding of $2 million annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 and continuing for three years, to support implementation of laws passed by the Council in 2019 and bolster integration planning and initiatives.**

With the Mayor and the Chancellor expressing willingness and understanding of the need to support remedies for historic school segregation, the City Council has a continued role in renewing forgotten and unfunded mandates, with the proper funding and urgency to make them happen. **A $2 million annual investment is a modest but essential step to operationalize these laws, turning existing mandates and data into real, community-driven integration outcomes across the system.**

EXPAND SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & MENTAL HEALTH ACCESS

When it comes to school safety, if we want safer schools, then the education budget must also include school-based restorative justice and mental health access, including **investing $80 million in hiring School Climate Coordinators in 500 schools.** The new School Climate Coordinator roles would be responsible for training staff and implementing restorative justice and healing-centered programming to priority middle and high schools.

We can fund this expansion simply by not hiring any new School Safety Agents due to attrition or new classes and cutting all vacancies. This would allow the City to shift resources away from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and stopping funding for surveillance technology. Simply by not hiring any more school police, NYC could save up to $90 million in one fiscal year.

REFORM SCHOOL GOVERNANCE OF NYCPS

Lastly, while we are witnessing rising levels of authoritarianism from the federal government, parents in NYC are pushing for more democracy in our system, which is the largest public school system in the nation. Our parents are tired of performative engagement from NYCDOE. The current iteration of CECs consists of parents frustrated with their council's inability to make any meaningful impact on the system due to lack of legal authority in developing, approving, or

rejecting policies, with the exception of school zoning. **We need the Council to hold the DOE accountable in ensuring improvements for the process around meaningful parent engagement, professional development, and support, as well as a better process around CEC elections.** Currently as is, the DOE is not equipped to manage citywide elections involving hundreds of thousands of voters. In fact, recent cycles of CEC elections have had so many errors occur that parent leaders called for a full audit in 2023 that led to the NYC Comptroller urging the DOE to improve the process. **We urge the Council to support parent leaders calling on the DOE to:**

- **Create an advisory committee of parent leaders and representatives of community organizations, who will survey rightsholders and develop recommendations on:**
    - **The functions and roles of FACE**
    - **The structure of FACE**
    - **Immediate implementable improvements to provide support to parent leaders**
- **Audit the 2025 CCEC Elections; begin preparing for 2027 cycle with dedicated staff and engagement with CCEC and CPAC members.**
- **Increase the number of students whose families have at least one NYCSA account by 20%, focusing on families of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing.**
- **Ensure FACE is in a collaborative and supportive relationship with the Division of School Leadership, the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning (DIAL), and other central offices, in order to inform and work in partnership with CCECs on directives to meet district goals and priorities.**
- **Allow Community Education Councils to approve school co-locations and closures.**

In order to build towards a better system, AQE echoes the Coalition for a New Democratic School Governance System's demands to:

- **Convene and fund an independent and community-led, School Governance Commission that includes students, parents/caregivers, educators, and other education stakeholders to articulate a transition plan for a fully elected school board for NYCPS by 2027.**
    - This Commission should be tasked with ensuring parents, particularly parents of color, whose children make up the majority in NYC public schools, are educated

and informed about how to run for local positions and receive training in how to manage school operations.

- The commission should ensure the new system centers the needs of historically marginalized groups, Black, Brown, low-income, students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, foster care students, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, and English Language Learners.
    - This includes keeping certain types of decisions intentionally centralized and system-wide.
- The commission should ensure the new democratic school governance system secures real decision-making power for students, parents, and educators. They must also have access to independent support, mentorship, and training to participate fully in governance.
- The new democratic school governance system must establish an effective relationship between local and centralized decision-making. Even citywide decisions should have a local mechanism for feedback and implementation planning.

We also echo the ECC's reforms, sent to the Mayor and Chancellor, that would strengthen district leadership teams, community and citywide education councils, and school leadership teams without requiring action from the state.

Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026

Gilberto Alvarado
Aftercare Specialist
Anthos | Home
Communications@anthoshome.org
212-606-0785

Good morning, Chair Dinowitz and the Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Gilberto Alvarado, and I am an Aftercare Specialist at Anthos|Home. We help New Yorkers with housing vouchers move out of shelter and into permanent housing as quickly as possible. We are a member of the Family Homelessness Coalition, Homeless Services United, and the Homes Can't Wait Coalition.

Today, I'd like to speak about how we can address the homelessness crisis at New York City Public Schools. In the 2024-25 school year, more than 150,000 students experienced homelessness—and the rate rose in every borough. Homeless families account for 69% of those living in shelter in New York City, and they experience longer average stays in shelter than single adults.

Beyond a moral obligation, reducing student homelessness is one of the clearest pathways to the City's goals of increasing school attendance and improving academic outcomes.

School-Based Housing Pilot

Anthos|Home is requesting funding for a school-based housing pilot that would bring our unique housing model to a group of high-need public schools and move all voucher-eligible students and their families out of shelter and into homes.

The pilot will help New York City Public Schools address one of the root causes of chronic absenteeism, academic challenges, and socio-emotional needs—housing instability—and redirect recurring City spending on homelessness support towards more efficient, permanent solutions for families that offer long-term savings.

Program Structure

Anthos|Home's innovative program model streamlines the housing voucher process to get New Yorkers housed faster and to stay housed long-term. We fill in the gaps in the voucher process and help families use vouchers to move into a stable home. By pairing our program model with New York City Public Schools's established, trust-based communication pathways—such as the Every Child and Family is Known program, the Community Schools model, and Bridging the Gap social workers—we can eliminate the roadblocks children and families face, speed move-ins, and give students the tools they need to succeed.

Program Need

Students in shelter have significantly higher rates of chronic absenteeism and lower graduation rates than their housed peers. In the 2023-24 school year, 67% of students in shelter were chronically absent, meaning they missed at least one out of every ten school days. Students in shelter also dropped out of high school at triple the rate of permanently housed peers, and they have significantly lower scores on math and English exams. Housing assistance is shown to have a direct impact on these outcomes: students who receive rental assistance have been shown to experience a 22% reduction in the number of school days missed due to illness, and lower levels school average absenteeism are associated with a major increase in math and ELA scores school-wide.

Further, the associated costs of student homelessness for New York City are significant. In FY22, the total NYCPS budget for homeless services was about $112 million, including $18 million in staffing costs for STH Community Coordinators and STH Family Assistants to support Students in

Temporary Housing (STH). By investing in long-term solutions that reduce the population of STH, we expect the City will be able to reduce spending on short-term supports, like busing costs.

Impact

The pilot would not only move designated families out of shelter and into permanent homes, but it would also enable New York City Public Schools and Anthos|Home to evaluate the efficacy of this model in addressing student homelessness, its impact on student performance and school operations, and its scalability as a large-scale housing solution.

Low or No-Cost Process Changes

In addition, there are opportunities for immediate and impactful low or no-cost changes to the voucher process that would ease the housing process for families with children and, as a result, minimize interruptions to students' education. These include:

1. Streamlining the CityFHEPS Voucher Package

   A complete CityFHEPS voucher package is often over 100 pages when it is submitted, and the DHS review checklist includes more than 100 criteria for approval. By streamlining the voucher package compilation and review process to eliminate duplicative and unnecessary checks, the City can significantly speed moves out of shelter and into homes.

2. Adjust Shelter Transfer Process (as recommended by Citizen's Committee for Children New York)

Families are often moved from shelter to shelter, which causes children to have to transfer schools or parents to make hours-long commutes for drop off and pick up. For example, when the attendance team at a school in the Bronx recently reached out to one of their chronically absent students, they found the family had been placed in a Manhattan shelter. As a result, the student's mother, who was six months pregnant and had health concerns, faced significant challenges getting him to school, even resorting to paying for an Uber to campus.

By guaranteeing initial shelter placements within the school district or borough of family's youngest child's school, as well as expediting the process to request and receive shelter transfers, the City can minimize disruptions in education and unnecessary burdens on families.

Together with a school-based housing pilot, these solutions will help more children and young adults move out of shelter and into homes and reduce the negative impacts of housing instability on these vulnerable populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: FY 2027 Preliminary Budget – Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jindu Obiofuma. I am the Special Education Policy Manager at Advocates for Children of New York, and I am speaking today on behalf of the ARISE Coalition, which I coordinate. ARISE comprises parents, teachers, academics, advocates and allies who have been working since 2008 to advocate for systemic solutions to the challenges faced by New York City public school students with disabilities and their families.

There are many challenges faced by students with disabilities, and the City must make the investments needed to provide every student with the special education evaluations, services, and programs they have a legal right to receive, but I want to use this time to discuss the particular challenges posed by the lack of school buildings that are accessible to students, families, educators, and community members with physical disabilities.

Today, more than 35 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, only about a third of New York City public schools are fully accessible. When schools are inaccessible, students often have to travel long distances to receive their education and miss out on opportunities to build formative relationships with students in their own communities. Inaccessible schools also raise employment challenges for educators and staff with physical disabilities while limiting opportunities for relatives and community members with physical disabilities to attend important gatherings like PTA meetings or school plays.

Five years ago, the situation was much worse, with fewer than one in five schools fully accessible, so we are encouraged by the City's progress with the funding allocated to school accessibility. However, the $800 million in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan is insufficient, given that NYC Public Schools itself estimated that, at this pace, it would take *ten* five-year capital plans to reach full accessibility. Conversely, $1.5 billion in sustained funding for school accessibility would enable us to achieve full accessibility in half that time.

We are asking for the City to allocate at least **an additional $450 million in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan for school accessibility projects, bringing the total investment in the current Capital Plan to $1.25 billion.** With that money, the City could make an estimated 45 percent of NYC public schools fully accessible by the end of the current plan and come closer to realizing the unmet promise of the ADA.

Thank you.

ARTHUR MILLER FOUNDATION

FOR THEATER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JAIME HASTINGS

TRUSTEES
REBECCA MILLER
SANDI FARKAS

BOARD
DAVID HOMAN, CHAIR
BARBARA RICCI, TREASURER
GERI HAUPT
DAWSON HORN
ALIA JONES-HARVEY
GARY S. MORIWAKI
AARON SIEGEL
JANINE SMITH

ARTIST & INDUSTRY COUNCIL
ALEC BALDWIN
ELLEN BARKIN
PAUL CANAAN
DAMON CARDASIS
AYODELE CASEL
BRADLEY COOPER
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS
KATORI HALL
SEAN HAYES
PATRICK HEROLD
DUSTIN HOFFMAN
SASHA HUTCHINGS
SCARLETT JOHANSSON
TONY KUSHNER
NATHAN LANE
KEVIN LIN
MICHAEL MAYER
JULIE McBRIDE
JIM McELHINNEY
JULIANNE MOORE
MICHAEL MOORE
LIAM NEESON
LYNN NOTTAGE
CHIKÉ OKONKWO
DIANE PAULUS
ANTHONY RAMOS
LIEV SCHREIBER
SHERIE RENE SCOTT
CINDY TOLAN
NIK WALKER

Written Testimony for the New York City Council Education Committee Hearing, March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chair Eric Dinowitz and the Education Committee for your efforts to ensure budget support for arts education across New York City. I serve as the Executive Director of the Arthur Miller Foundation, an independent, grassroots non-profit organization honoring the legacy of the American playwright, Arthur Miller, and his New York City public school education, by increasing equitable access to quality theater education for New York City public school students. In-school theater instruction provided by a full-time, certified theater teacher, and included as an integral part of a comprehensive K-12 public school education, ensures access to all students regardless of economic status.

The Arthur Miller Foundation (AMF) accomplishes this mission by certifying and supporting teachers to build sustainable in-school theater programs. AMF currently supports 140 full-time theater teachers in NYC Public Schools, accounting for **50% of current full-time public school theater teachers in New York City. These teachers reach 70,000 students in all 5 boroughs of NYC.** Over the course of 3 years, theater teachers receive dedicated support to build sustainable in-school theater programs through mentorship, cultural partner residencies, classroom materials, theater tickets for students, and ongoing professional development. In addition to providing the only support of its kind to NYC theater teachers, AMF breaks down affordability barriers by funding free experiences for teachers and students including theater residencies with prominent NYC cultural institutions, which bring teaching artists into the classroom for 8-10 weeks, and theater tickets to attend Broadway and Off-Broadway productions.

In January 2025, the National Endowment for the Arts' released the results of its decades-long study, *Snapshots of Arts Education in Childhood and Adolescence: Access and Outcomes*, demonstrating that access to in-school arts education significantly enhances **social emotional learning and development**, including peer social support and perseverance in pursuit of a goal. Access to in-school arts education also directly correlates to **higher test scores, GPAs, and graduation rates**.

The following is testimony from a current AMF Fellow teaching in The Bronx:

> "The AMF Fellowship has transformed my ability to serve these students. With AMF support, I have been able to deepen my craft, access professional development, and bring more robust, creative theater experiences into my classroom. My students—many of whom struggle with communication, social-emotional regulation, and confidence—have found their voices through drama. Theater has become a powerful tool for self-expression, community building, and academic growth."

In order to do our part to continue providing equitable, affordable access to theater education for public school students across NYC, we sincerely request that Education Committee considers the vital importance of funding in-school arts education programming through the Arts Office and by hiring certified, full-time theater teachers. Please help us ensure that theater education is prioritized and considered a right — not a privilege. Thank you for your time.

Jaime Hastings

Jaime Hastings
Executive Director

BIOBUS

1361 Amsterdam Ave Ste 340
New York, NY 10027
www.biobus.org

March 24, 2026
New York City Council

Re: BioBus Testimony for New York City Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education

Dear Finance Chair, Linda Lee and Education Chair, Rita Joseph, Education Committee,

It's my pleasure to submit testimony on behalf of BioBus. BioBus began in 2008 with a mission to help K-12 and college students discover, explore, and pursue science. We focus on students excluded from the scientific community due to factors such as race, gender, economic status, and physical access. Through this work, we envision a world where all people have the opportunity to reach their full scientific potential.

BioBus is launching two new all-electric Mobile Labs and reaching 20-25% more students this year. We expect to reach over 40,000 students by the end of the 2025-26 school year. Yet, we need to continue growing to meet the overwhelming demand of schools in your district for laboratory science education and for science career pathways for young people. I hope you will join the many private funders who have recently increased their support for BioBus. **I respectfully request $200,000 in operating support for BioBus in the FY27 New York City Budget** to help 55,000 students engage in hands-on science and critical thinking next year**.**

BioBus was grateful to receive a total of $289,400 in operating support from New York City Council Members, including a **$100,000 allocation from the Speaker's initiative** last year. Along with annual support from the State, this award supported growing our annual operating budget from $3.3M to $5.3M. We are proud to have raised additional private support that means **every dollar you allocate is matched four times** by private funding sources.

Increased funding will also leverage previous NYC and State capital investments in our new mobile labs, increase private investment, and help to meet the increasing need for high-level, experience-based science education for K-12 and college students. This level of support in the City budget and through discretionary funding will help to **enable another 20%-25% increase in Mobile Lab Programs across New York City next year.** $200,000 in operating support will help us to fully utilize City, State, and private capital investments in our LES, Harlem, and Bronx brick and mortar neighborhood labs.

Fueled by their natural curiosity, BioBus students work with professional scientists to use science to explore questions about their world. Young scientists, inspired aboard the mobile lab, sign-up for after school and summer programs in BioBus neighborhood science lab, and move into BioBus paid research internships. After BioBus, students are ready to join and diversify the rapidly growing STEM workforce in New York. BioBus alumni are currently working at Pfizer, in

research labs at Columbia, NYU, and Mount Sinai, training to become science teachers, and pursuing Ph.D.'s at top universities.

BioBus brings our students into the scientific community, a community they have often been excluded from, and prepares them for life-changing academic and career opportunities. Over 450,000 students have done science on a BioBus mobile lab, and 99% of teachers want a return visit! A seventh grade student at a public school recently told us:

> *"Your visit made science feel more fun and comfortable. Because of BioBus I feel more excited to learn more about science and its magic.This experience helped me think about being more of a astronomer one day. And I appreciate how you took the time to teach us about cells and show us the little water creatures."*

This year, with an operating budget of $5.3M, we will work with more than 40,000 students! BioBus brings exciting, hands-on science programs to students throughout the New York City area. We reach students in every corner of Harlem and the Lower East Side, where our proven pathway empowers young scientists from their initial excitement to paid internships. In 2024, launched BioBus Bronx, hiring a dedicated Director of Community Science to expand our work in the borough. Now, just one year into our strategic plan, we have developed the infrastructure to reach over 400,000 students in five years and establish new neighborhood science teams. New York is ready for more science, and we are ready to deliver. Our students will become the next generation of great thinkers and leaders - they are already using science to develop alternative energy sources derived from bacteria, find ways to mitigate the effects of rising sea levels on coastlines, investigate the safety of drinking water in their DOE schools, study how heatwaves impact air quality in their own NYC neighborhoods, and explore how rain gardens can help fight increased flooding.

The need for proven science programs like BioBus is dramatic. NYC's biotech and life sciences industries continue to grow, offer high-paying jobs, and look towards our young people to fill those jobs. We have to turn away hundreds of schools and high school internship applicants every year due to lack of capacity. NYC EDC recognizes the importance of BioBus programs and invested $1.1M to build BioBus Bronx. **At a time when Federal support for science education is dwindling rapidly, we need your help to ensure young people have the skills to address pressing local and global challenges, innovate, and think critically about the world around them.**

BioBus's research-grade laboratory experiences led by masters- and Ph.D.-level scientists give students of all races, ethnicities, and genders, including those underrepresented in STEM careers, the opportunity to start their scientific path and excel. BioBus community scientists empower students to investigate problems close to home, such as testing the toxicity levels in neighborhood community gardens and researching the impact of microplastics on the ecosystems of the Hudson River. Our students bring their family, their friends, and their neighbors along and create a constant, constructive dialogue with their community as it merges with the scientific community.

BioBus was founded in NYC in 2008, when our Executive Director Ben bought a 1974 public transit bus on Craigslist and converted it into a research-grade science lab on wheels. Now with two mobile labs and two more launching this year, BioBus visits one or two different schools every day. School's request a visit through our website or a BioBus community scientist reaches out to offer a visit. Most schools pay only a nominal fee - as little as 6% of the cost to run the program - based on a sliding scale. Two community scientists with research experience invite an entire class and their teacher onboard the bus during a normal 45 minute school period. Community scientists lead classes in ecology, anatomy, adaptation, evolution, and cell biology, all using science relevant to students and their immediate surroundings. Using microscopes, students gain an immediate sense of how science relates to their lives. BioBus offers curriculum for all ages and students, working with schools to pick the best curriculum for their students and regularly teaching ESL classes with a large number of BioBus staff fluent or proficient in Spanish.

At brick-and-mortar BioBase neighborhood labs, onsite at schools, and in community centers, BioBus offers in-depth after school, weekend, and summer programs for students in upper elementary school and above. BioBus scientists lead students in project-based scientific exploration, exploring air and water quality in their neighborhoods, learning about the impact of plants on temperature and food insecurity, learning from nature through biomimicry, studying technology from solar cars to block coding, among other topics. High school and college students can be paid Junior Scientist interns, mentoring younger students and gaining in-depth research science experience, an uncommon experience that research shows is a primary factor in supercharging a young person’s career in science.

The requested funding will help us to purchase lab supplies, and re-fuel and re-charge our mobile labs, and hire new BioBus community scientists and program coordinators. The heart of BioBus is a team of highly committed, innovative, and experienced scientists who work tirelessly with NYS students as they prepare to lead a more diverse scientific community that will deliver for all New Yorkers.

New York is ready for more, and we are ready to deliver. **With your help, BioBus will grow towards reaching every student in New York City.** Those students will become the next generation of great thinkers and leaders - they are already using science to fight climate change and food insecurity, identify disease before it spreads to humans, and study degenerative eye diseases and addiction. **I respectfully request that you support BioBus’ $200,000 request to fund city-wide programs.** These students will join BioBus’ Science Pathway, become tomorrow’s scientists, leaders, and critical thinkers, and fill the high-quality jobs in the city’s growing biotech and life sciences industries.

Thank you for your continued support of BioBus and for considering this request. I look forward to discussing how we can inspire the next generation of scientists from your district and across New York City.

Sincerely,

Latasha Wright
Co-Founder and Executive Scientific Officer
(347) 878-3210 | latasha@biobus.org

Students aboard one of the new BioBus Mobile Labs, which will soon visit a different school every day

Dr. Shango Blake
President, Black Edfluencers-United (BE-U)
Spokesperson, Education Equity Action Plan Coalition (EEAPC)

March 23, 2026

Eric Dinowitz
Chair, Education Committee
New York City Council

Dear Chair Dinowitz,

My name is Dr. Shango Blake, President of Black Edfluencers United (BE-U) and spokesperson for the Education Equity Action Plan Coalition (EEAPC). I write to you on behalf of our organization and coalition, both of which have been at the forefront of advocating for the implementation of a comprehensive Black Studies curriculum in New York City Public Schools.

After four years of persistent advocacy, we are proud that Black Studies: As a Study of the World: A PreK-12 Curriculum is now available across New York City Public Schools. However, its implementation has been lackluster and has not received the level of prioritization or fidelity that this historic initiative deserves.

We have met with multiple chancellors who have expressed strong verbal support for Black Studies. Yet, despite these affirmations, there has been a consistent gap between words and action. As I often say: *Words plus action equal results*. At this stage, we must move beyond rhetoric and toward transparent, measurable, and accountable implementation.

We are currently in active discussions with Chancellor Kamal Samuels and his senior leadership team regarding the future of Black Studies. As part of this process, we are calling for clear answers and commitments in the following areas:

- **Prioritization:** Will Black Studies be elevated to the same level of importance as initiatives such as NYC Reads, NYC Solves, and Hidden Voices?
- **Messaging & Leadership:** How will superintendents communicate the importance of Black Studies to principals and school communities within their districts?
- **Professional Development:** What training structures are being implemented to ensure educators are equipped to deliver this curriculum effectively?
- **Accountability:** How will the Chancellor and central leadership hold district superintendents accountable for meaningful implementation?
- **Resource Allocation:** Given the $27 million already invested in the development of this curriculum, what financial supports will be provided to schools to ensure successful implementation?

- **Community Engagement:** What expectations will be set for schools to engage families and communities, promote awareness, and build support for Black Studies?

We believe deeply in the power of self-knowledge. The inclusion of Black Studies in our schools is not just an academic enhancement—it is a correction of a historic omission. While Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE) has opened important doors, Black Studies is foundational. It centers the experiences, contributions, and excellence of Black people—who have historically been among the most marginalized and least accurately represented in educational systems.

By teaching Black Studies, we affirm the identity and potential of Black students while educating all students about the profound contributions of Black people to this nation and the world—knowledge that remains far too absent in our current system.

We look forward to working in partnership with the New York City Council to ensure that Black Studies is not just available, but meaningfully implemented in every New York City public school with fidelity, transparency, and accountability.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,
Dr. Shango Blake
President, Black Influences United (BU)
Spokesperson, Education Equity Action Plan Coalition (EEAPC)

CAMBA Inc.

Testimony Before the New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you, Council Member Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Valerie Barton-Richardson, and I am the President and CEO of CAMBA, Inc. and CAMBA Housing Ventures, Inc. At CAMBA, we take pride in serving nearly 80,000 individuals and families across New York City each year, through more than 180 programs at over 100 locations in all five boroughs. Our work is deeply rooted in a comprehensive, client-centered approach that supports New Yorkers in achieving stability and self-sufficiency. Through programs focused on housing stability, education, youth development, economic empowerment, and community services, CAMBA has been strengthening communities for decades.

While we appreciate the restoration of funding for summer programming in the FY27 Preliminary Budget, we believe there is more to be done to prepare for Summer 2026. The City must move beyond the current Summer Rising model, which was created in 2021 in response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this model served a critical purpose at the time, today's students have different needs. As such, the City must engage with local stakeholders to pilot alternative summer programming that reflects the diverse needs of New York's young people.

A recent study conducted by UNH, which surveyed 700 parents and community-based organizations (CBOs), found significant concerns regarding the efficacy of Summer Rising. One of the key findings was that 58% of parents did not have a backup option if Summer Rising were unavailable, with the percentage rising to 64% among low-income families. Additionally, middle school students expressed frustration with the DOE-led academic sessions, with 87% of participants not feeling engaged in the morning sessions. Communication around the academic curriculum was also a major concern for parents, as many were unclear about their child's learning needs and the program's objectives.

Furthermore, there were widespread concerns about the adequacy of accommodations for students with IEPs and English Language Learners.

The Department of Education's own Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis also points to troubling results. Middle school participants who attended the program for 20 or more days showed no significant improvement in Math scores, and, in fact, performed worse in reading than their peers who did not attend. This data underscores our concern that the Summer Rising model is not an appropriate fit for all middle school youth.

The summer months offer a unique opportunity for students to explore, engage, and develop outside of the traditional school year. While higher-income families have access to a range of summer enrichment options, many low-income families rely on city-funded programs to ensure their children have a safe and enriching summer. In light of this, we believe it is essential to support a range of alternative summer programming models. These include successful models like COMPASS Summer, which is funded by DYCD and incorporates field trips, physical activities, leadership development, and integrated academics; Freedom Schools, a culturally sensitive program focused on academics, civic engagement, and social-emotional learning; and innovative models from settlement houses, such as Life Lines Arts Camp and the Learning Campus Model, which emphasize community-building, academic enrichment, and student choice.

Equally important is the need to secure consistent and stable funding for critical programs like Learning to Work (LTW). Since 2005, LTW has been instrumental in supporting over-age, under-credited youth, helping them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan. Unfortunately, funding for LTW has been unstable, with the City relying on temporary federal stimulus funds during the pandemic. We are now at risk of losing $31 million in funding for LTW by June 2026, which would severely impact its ability to continue supporting vulnerable students. We urge the City Council and the Mayor to commit to baselining this $31 million in the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget to ensure these programs can continue without disruption.

Additionally, the City's release of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for LTW in December 2025 presents another critical challenge. The RFP seeks $57.4 million in total funding to support LTW, but there is a $14.4 million funding gap that needs to be filled. To ensure the program's integrity and success, we ask NYCPS to align the RFP goals and outcomes with the needs identified in the 2025 Eskolta Report, *What Does LTW Look Like at Its Best?*. The current form of the RFP risks undermining LTW's proven success in supporting the hardest-to-serve young adults, helping them graduate and transition to college and careers.

The success of LTW speaks for itself. Independent studies have shown that students in Transfer Schools with LTW support are 51.4% more likely to graduate than similar peers. Internship outcomes are particularly strong, with 97% of interns graduating, compared to 62% of non-interns, and interns passing 78% of their courses compared to 58% of their peers. LTW has proven to create safer, more supportive school environments with stronger student-teacher relationships, providing thousands of young people with the skills, confidence, and resources to succeed.

In conclusion, it is imperative that the City prioritize the needs of its most vulnerable students by investing in diverse and effective summer programming models and ensuring the continued success of programs like Learning to Work. By stabilizing funding and aligning goals to the needs of young people, we can protect graduation gains, strengthen the workforce pipeline, and reduce long-term social service and public safety costs. We urge the Mayor and the City Council to work together to support these vital initiatives, which have been proven to transform the lives of New York City's youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Valerie Barton-Richardson
President and CEO
CAMBA, Inc./CAMBA Housing Ventures, Inc.

CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026
March 23, 2026
Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Education

Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Council Committee on Education:

My name is David Freudenthal, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. Thanks for the opportunity to testify about the longstanding partnership between Carnegie Hall and the Department of Education in service to our city's schools.

Carnegie Hall is a leader in creating affordable, accessible, and far-reaching music education and social impact programs that inspire the next generation of music lovers, nurture musical talent, contribute to the evolution of music education, and explore how music can play a meaningful role in people's lives. Each year, these free or low-cost programs reach 130,000 people in NYC in orchestras, arts organizations, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, hospitals, and of course, schools, supporting music learning at all levels. **Carnegie Hall's schools programs reach 55,000 students and 550 teachers yearly.** As Carnegie Hall provides these essential programs at low or no cost to participants, Carnegie Hall takes on a significant financial obligation in delivering world-class education to young New Yorkers.

Carnegie Hall is also a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a collective of 39 nonprofit museums, performing arts centers, historical societies, zoos, and botanical gardens across all five boroughs with a distinct private-public partnership with the City of New York and a commitment to serving all New Yorkers. In keeping with our public service mission, CIGs support New Yorkers' education with high quality free or low-cost programming, as well as to advocate for essential help from government to sustain our sector during moments of uncertainty and crisis. In the context of that advocacy, **Carnegie Hall endorses the CIG request to baseline an additional $30 million in dedicated funding to DCLA to support cultural organizations to provide sustainable arts education for all.** This funding is critical to supporting culture and arts jobs. Without this funding, cultural organizations face burdensome challenges in staffing, planning, and programming. This impacts the wide variety of essential education programs our organizations deliver across the city.

In addition to our advocacy on behalf of our city's students and teachers, I'm glad to share information about the Hall's direct service to New Yorkers, including constituents in your Council Districts: Carnegie Hall works closely with stakeholders throughout the education ecosystem—educators, parents, public officials, and young people—to ensure that our programs intentionally prioritize those who otherwise may not have access to these opportunities. I'm glad to share some examples:

- Regarded by DOE's Office of Arts and Special Projects as a lead partner in music education, Carnegie Hall's school programs have effectively delivered the agency's standards for music education, providing high quality, fundamental music instruction and best practices by amplifying and celebrating the cultural richness of our city for over a decade. Our learning and engagement programs inspire the next generation of music lovers in NYC's K-12 classrooms and support local teachers in refining their skills. This year, the Hall supports school-based programs both in-person and remotely, including Link Up and Musical Explorers for elementary-age children,

Music Educators Workshop for NYC teachers, and for middle and high school students through Ensemble Connect.

- Carnegie Hall has been a longstanding partner of the New York City Department of Education, offering collaboration through the Middle School Arts Audition Bootcamp at Lincoln Center, the Summer Arts Institute at Frank Sinatra School of the Arts, the Professional Learning Day series for Music Educators and programming at the ArtsHub. Carnegie Hall has been a strong thought partner for staffing, planning and future envisioning for the DOE through these programs. New this year, Carnegie Hall is proud to be partnering with the DOE to feature six of the All-City High School Music program ensembles in an end of year showcase in Stern Auditorium on Sunday, May 10th at 1pm, welcoming over 300 DOE students onto the stage with side-by-side performances and guest artists.

    - **Musical Explorers** connects over 6,000 students in grades K–2 to NYC's rich and diverse musical community as they build fundamental music skills through listening, singing, and moving to songs from all over the world. Each season, students meet six NYC–based artists who each represent a different musical genre and cultural tradition. Teachers have access to a free curriculum, professional development, and a culminating interactive concert for their students.

    - **Link Up**—Carnegie Hall's longest running education program—introduces the orchestra to roughly 11,000 children annually in grades 3-5, inviting them to sing and play an instrument in the classroom and perform with a professional orchestra from their seats at a culminating concert at Carnegie Hall. Both programs continue to expand with digital platforms that provide teachers with free online resources, including lesson plans, artist-led videos, and virtual concert experiences.
        - This year, there are still openings in the Link Up program. Slots for participating students are still open, and Carnegie Hall we would be glad to follow up with your committee and offices with recruitment information to share with your constituents

    - **Music Educators Workshop** provides on average more than 150 NYC K–12 music teachers monthly professional development each year, in a vital space for teachers to recognize their shared experiences and receive support, community, and professional growth. Leading artists and educators join as faculty to lead curriculum tracks pertinent to this season's theme for NYC teachers, "The Art of Great Teaching." The program leverages teachers as catalysts to enhance the quality of instruction for 32,000 NYC students each year. A hallmark of this program is to inspire artistry and seeing teachers as artists in their own right. MEW provides teachers with opportunities to participate in ensembles each year with a culminating concert. This year, our educator ensembles will take the stage in Zankel Hall on June 6th, 2026 and will feature a Wind Ensemble, Contemporary Strings Ensemble, Vocal Ensemble and a Neo Soul Ensemble.

    - **Ensemble Connect** is a program of Carnegie Hall and The Juilliard School in partnership with DOE. Ensemble Connect places extraordinary young classical musicians for a two-year fellowship in NYC public schools. Fellows partner with DOE music teachers to bring insight, creativity, and artistry to classrooms; and create interactive performances in schools and at community sites.

- Carnegie Hall's early childhood programs encourage connection, well-being, and creativity for families, most of whom are facing challenging personal circumstances. The **Lullaby Project** pairs new and expectant parents and caregivers with professional artists to write and sing personal lullabies for their babies, supporting maternal health, aiding child development, and strengthening the bond between parent and child. Since the launch at Jacobi Medical Center in 2011, thousands of families have written original songs for their children through city agency partnerships including the NYC Departments of Education (DOE's LYFE program), Correction (DOC), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Homeless Services (DHS), the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the Housing Authority (NYCHA). **Big Note, Little Note**, is a free music class for NYC families that offers a range of experiences for families and caregivers to engage with their babies through musical play, singing, instrument exploration, and more. The program is centered around community, and supports family well-being, early childhood development, and parent-child connection.

As NYC navigates a world of uncertainty, Carnegie Hall's education programs are critical components of the city's strategy to meet people directly, effectively, and affordably where they are. The Council's continued investment in these partnerships will be absolutely essential in the year ahead. We thank the Committee for their interest in these programs, and we encourage the Council to invest in these opportunities and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss Carnegie Hall's education and community programming partnerships in your district. You are all welcome to attend the culminating concerts for Musical Explorers in early May and Link Up in late May to witness the joyful and participatory capstone experience in our concert halls. Thank you for your support for and consideration of our requests, and thanks to our public partners, artists and arts organizations, teachers, stakeholders, and the talented young people involved in these programs for being a part of truly transformational changes.

Testimonial from School Programs Stakeholders:

"Carnegie Hall is the future. These workshops are extremely mindful of human connection and how music can be a catalyst for this connection and bringing people, nations, worlds together. It's a truly beautiful, gratifying, humbling, inspiring and passionate connection. It gives so many tools for educators to bring positive changes to, not only their classroom, but to their connections, personal and professional and of their self-improvement every day. I believe every educator should be part of this incredible program. And I feel extremely grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of it. Thank you!!"—Isabella Mendes, local Music Educators Workshop participant

"After watching Layths video, one of my students shared proudly with me that "he is a Muslim, too" Another one became interested in a violin because "it sounded beautiful" and some kids loved Bluegrass music and others fell in love with Chinese Traditional. We really opened up a varied musical world for them. Some of them were asking for more music from various cultures in various languages!" - Valeria Shkop, teacher at PS 193 (Musical Explorers)

"There is nothing that I can do to truly prepare my students for the adventure that they are about to begin. We learn the songs, we explore the activities, but it is not until they first step foot into the concert hall that they realize what a big deal this is. They have truly arrived at a musical, cultural landmark." - Ryan Mack, Teacher at P.S. 10K (Link Up)

“Carnegie Hall always helps me expand what I believe is possible in the music classroom.” - Kim Walton, teacher at Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing and Visual Arts (Music Educators Workshop)

“When the pandemic first hit like most teachers I was at a loss on how to navigate through remote teaching and better yet what would work best for my students. I worked with my fellow, Nicolee Kuester, and we made a plan for students who had instruments versus those who did not. This was part of our foundation for the current school year. With the added resources that Deanna Kennett and the members of Ensemble Connect provided, Nicolee and I were able to solidify the students learning through the helpful videos of instruments, as well as their new form of interactive performances to help students engage in new ways. My students have especially loved the "Princess Bear Snake and Cowboy" performance as well as the one utilizing the concept of soundscapes. In a time when music is needed to help the students, Ensemble Connect was able to provide the students and teachers with various resources to not only help engage the students but also help drive their creativity.” - Ensemble Connect Partner Teacher Laurél Hornick from Grover Cleveland High School

“I consider music to be the soundtrack of my life and was excited when the opportunity presented itself for me to introduce and bond with my son through music. In April 2021 while being on maternity leave, I enrolled in Big Note Little Note online music class with my 3-months-old son, Jacob. I looked forward to Wednesdays because it was something that helped with bonding and the development of my son. As a new mom, I realized that everything became a song. Even something as simple as changing a diaper. Jacob’s face would light up with laughter when I sang or play music. He also had a favorite song from the class that I would sing to him. Lastly, I enjoyed fellowshipping with the other families. The weekly “music moments” were useful in furthering our connection with music outside the class. I really wish there was a Big Note Little Note Alumni music class as I think Jacob and I would love a continuation of such an amazing experience.” - Stacyann Coley, Big Note, Little Note participant

Children's Aid
Every step of the way

New York City Council, Education Committee
Budget and Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027
Submitted Testimony by Dr. Brenda Triplett, Senior Director of Educational Achievement & Partnerships at Children's Aid
March 23rd, 2026

Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the preliminary city budget.

My name is Dr. Brenda Triplett, Senior Director of Educational Achievement & Partnerships at Children's Aid – a multi-service human services organization and one of the largest child welfare agencies in NYC.I am a retired public school administrator with nearly 35 years of service, and I now work to improve outcomes for approximately 500 school-aged youth in foster care across New York City.

I would like to recognize the progress made to prioritize the educational rights of youth in foster care—a long-fought victory by advocates across the city. However, there is still a significant gap in providing adequate, guaranteed transportation to youth in foster care awaiting an OPT bus route.

This is my seventh year raising the issue before this committee.

Today, I would like to focus on youth in foster care with multiple disabilities and special needs. Many of these high acuity children wait for weeks, and even months for adequate school transportation. In the meantime, many are placed in private cars driven and/or chaperoned by child welfare staff, who are not appropriately trained for this responsibility.

Recently, I served as co-chaperone for a first-grade student, Abby, on her commute from Queens to her foster home in the Bronx. Abby is nonverbal and has multiple disabilities, including hydrocephalus and severe dermatitis. I witnessed staff struggle to safely lift and secure her, as she fought against the seatbelt, which irritated her sensitive skin.

During the nearly two-hour ride, Abby repeatedly tried to free herself, scratching her neck to the point of bleeding. She kicked and moaned in distress, unable to communicate her needs, while staff could not provide even basic care like applying ointment because we are not authorized to do so.

Changing her school was not an option as there were no openings in a District 75 school that could accommodate her needs. Neither were we willing to disrupt her loving foster home placement. Today . . . Abby still remains without an OPT route.

Seven years ago, former Chair Mark Treyger reminded us that budgets reflect our values. That remains true today.

In partnership with Advocates for Children of New York, I urge the city to include $3million to guarantee reliable, appropriate, safe bus transportation to students in foster care -- especially prioritizing those students with the highest needs.

Thank you.

New York City Council
New York City Council Education Committee and Early Childhood Education Subcommittee
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Testimony submitted by Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy
March 23rd, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, thank you to Chair Dinowitz and Chair Gutierrez and members of both the Committee on Education and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education for the opportunity to testify on the FY 27 preliminary budget hearing.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. By offering a continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need, close to home.

In addition to direct service delivery, Children's Aid engages in policy and advocacy work at all levels of government. Our policy priorities are informed by what we know works for children and families and by the persistent barriers our organization and staff encounter while serving the one in four New York City children living in poverty. To this end, Children's Aid is a proud member of numerous city-level coalitions focused on education including the Coalition for Community School Excellence (CCSCE), the Campaign for Children (C4C), and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF). Through these networks and alliances, we fully support their policy agendas.

As an organization that works in schools and with young people across some of New York City's most under-resourced neighborhoods, **we know the promise of a high-quality education for all remains unfulfilled for many families and communities**. Currently, only about half of economically disadvantaged students meet proficiency standards on statewide elementary and middle school ELA and math assessments—trailing their more affluent peers by roughly 27 percentage points—with similar disparities across race and ethnicity, multilingual learner status, and housing stability.[1]

We are encouraged to see the preliminary budget reflect the Mayor and Chancellor's commitment to closing this opportunity gap, including significant investments in early childhood education for our city's youngest learners. However, we also know these efforts will only succeed with sustained investment in the early childhood workforce, and that additional resources are still needed to remove barriers for the city's highest-need students. Above all, we urge that any future efforts to balance the budget do not come at the expense of children and families.

To that end, we urge the Council to:

[1] NYCPS State Test Results

1. Invest in the capacity and infrastructure needed for long-term community school sustainability and expansion
2. Advance salary parity and equity for the early childhood workforce
3. Invest $3M to address transportation barriers for students in foster care
4. Restore and baseline funding for essential education programs at risk of elimination, including Learning to Work ($31M) and Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery programs for students with intense sensory needs ($12M)
5. Partner with State leaders to make long overdue changes to the state's foundation aid funding formula

1. Community Schools

New York City is home to one of the largest portfolios of community schools in the nation and stands as a national leader in the strategy's implementation, with NYCPS' Office of Community Schools supporting 419 schools across New York City.

As part of our counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life, Children's Aid has been operating community schools in partnership with New York City Public Schools for over 30 years. Across our 19 community schools, educators, families, students, and community partners work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. Each school has a full-time community school director who works closely with school leadership and staff to coordinate integrated, data-informed supports aligned to the needs of students and the broader school community.

Children's Aid community schools deliver programs and services across four core domains: academics; social-emotional development; health and wellness; and family and community engagement. The majority of our schools have after-school programs, six have school-based health centers, and four have early childhood centers.

We have seen firsthand how the community school strategy addresses many of most pressing challenges our youth are facing, including alarming rates of chronic absenteeism, learning loss, mental and physical health issues, and food insecurity. Community school staff address these barriers by coordinating school-based supports that meet immediate needs while also employing targeted, data-driven interventions, such as success mentoring, to increase school engagement and attendance. Central to this work is building strong, trusting relationships with students and families.

These efforts produce meaningful results. Across all Children's Aid community schools, chronic absenteeism declined by an average of three percentage points in the most recent school year, with several schools achieving even greater gains. At PS 152, pairing chronically absent students with success mentors—who provided daily check-ins, academic support, attendance incentives, and family engagement—resulted in an 18-percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism over three years. These gains translate into long-term academic success: 80% of our high school students graduate within four years, and 99% of those who apply to college are accepted.

These results reflect broader research on community schools. A 2020 report , and a follow up 2022 study, found that the strategy is associated with higher attendance and graduation rates, improved academic achievement, fewer disciplinary incidents, and stronger student connectedness. During

the pandemic, community schools also proved more resilient: a recent analysis by NYPCS found that community schools outperformed comparison schools across key measures over the last ten years including:

- Graduation rates grew 13.5 percentage points more than the citywide average (25.1 vs. 11.6)
- ELA proficiency grew 3.8 percentage points more than the citywide average (22.9 vs. 19.1)
- Math proficiency grew 8.2 points percentage points more than the citywide average (26.7 vs. 18.5)
- Chronic absenteeism grew at a slower rate than the citywide average (with community schools seeing an increase of 4.3 percentage point, less than half of the citywide average of 9.8)

Further, community schools deliver these high-impact outcomes at a fraction of the cost of downstream interventions. By improving academic achievement and addressing root causes such as food insecurity, unmet health needs, and housing instability, community schools reduce reliance on costly crisis-response systems. National studies show returns of $10-14 for every dollar invested, and, in NYC, UFT data shows that a $100,000 investment in a Community School Director can leverage more than $600,000 in services and grants—making community schools a high-return, sustainable investment in student success.

While community schools have historically partnered with high-poverty communities disproportionately affected by systemic inequities, we believe **every school should be a community school,** because the strategy's benefits are universal and each community school is tailored to the unique assets and needs of the students and families it serves. When implemented at scale, community schools dramatically strengthen our public education system and would advance the Chancellor's key priorities of strengthening academic rigor, creating culturally responsive and community-connected classrooms, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and promoting family empowerment and collaborative leadership.

However, despite its demonstrated impact, the long-term sustainability of the strategy is at risk. Community schools in New York City face ongoing challenges, including unstable federal and state funding streams, inefficient contracting and procurement systems, delayed payments, and understaffing within the Office of Community Schools. These barriers strain implementation and limit the City's ability to sustain and expand the model effectively.

Budget Recommendation:

We are grateful to the City Council, the new administration, and NYCPS leadership for recognizing the value of the community school strategy and embracing non-profit providers as true partners in advancing the Chancellor's priorities. Maintaining level funding for the Office of Community Schools in FY27 and in the outyears is an important step that provides stability and builds trust between community-based organizations and City government. It also allows providers to shift focus from annual funding uncertainty to addressing the structural challenges that impact long-term success.

In partnership with the Coalition for Community School Excellence (CCSE), we urge the Council and the Administration to prioritize the following actions:

- **Expand Office of Community Schools (OCS) headcount from 20 to 28 full-time positions,** working toward a 15:1 program manager-to-provider ratio. This investment would help stabilize partnerships, address persistent contract and payment delays, and provide more targeted support to providers. Further, the addition of a staff member focused on data analysis and evaluation would further strengthen the system by improving data collection, supporting resource mapping, and ensuring fidelity to the community school model while better measuring impact.

- **Fund a city-wide impact study on the Community School strategy.** The two most recent evaluations, released in 2020 and 2022, rely on data only through the 2018–2019 school year and do not capture the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A new, comprehensive study would provide critical insights into the effectiveness of the city's community schools portfolio and identify implementation challenges that must be addressed to support future expansion.

- **Deepen engagement with community-based organizations in reimagining contracting and procurement processes** ahead of FY2028 contract renewals. While we appreciate that OCS has already sought provider input in this process by hosting a recent webinar and sharing a feedback survey, we urge OCS to continue to ensure providers have a seat at the table in identifying solutions to address longstanding payment challenges.

- **Commit to strategic expansion** by adding 100 new elementary community schools by 2028, while maintaining fidelity to the strategy.

- **Protect community school funding from potential federal and state cuts,** including key streams such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Full-Service Community Schools grants, and the Foundation Aid set-aside.

- **Partner with State leaders to advocate for a dedicated categorical funding stream for community schools** in the final state budget, which was included in the Senate and Assembly one house bills at $105 and $100 million.

At this critical moment for New York City's students and families, the City must reaffirm its commitment to community schools. By strengthening infrastructure, stabilizing funding, and expanding access, we can ensure that community schools continue to serve as anchors of stability, opportunity, and equity for generations to come.

2. Pay and Stability for the Early Childhood Workforce

Background:

Our Early Childhood Division serves nearly 700 of our youngest learners across nine sites in Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and Staten Island. Our early childhood programs are supported either directly through Head Start or passed-through Head Start DOE Contracts, and five of these sites are co-located within NYC Public Schools, helping to ensure strong alignment with the broader education system and smoother transitions into K–12. By offering programs in a range

of modalities—including standalone centers, community school–embedded programs, and home-based settings—we ensure families can access care in the setting that best meets their needs.

Our programs are designed to support the whole child and the whole family. Through both center-based and home-based models, we provide responsive, individualized support that fosters inclusive learning environments and meets the diverse developmental needs of all children, including dual- and multi-language learners. We engage families as early as possible—including before birth—recognizing that a strong foundation begins well before a child enters a classroom.

This comprehensive approach supports children's cognitive, language, and literacy development; strengthens early math and critical thinking skills; and promotes social-emotional well-being, self-regulation, and confidence. We use evidence-based tools and continuous assessment to tailor supports to each child's needs and drive ongoing improvement in program quality. As a result, we see strong outcomes: in the last academic year, 93% of children in our programs met or exceeded kindergarten readiness goals in math, and 90% did so in social-emotional development.

In a city where more than 80% of families with children under five cannot afford child care, these programs are a lifeline. They ease the financial burden on working families while providing the foundation for long-term academic and developmental success.

We are encouraged to see city and state leaders, alongside advocates, prioritize universal access to child care as a key strategy for improving affordability and quality of life. Families in New York City deserve a truly universal childcare system that includes robust birth to five programs, as well as full year out-of-school time services for students in 3k to 12th grade.

However, expanding access will only be possible if we simultaneously invest in and remove barriers for the community-based providers and staff who make this system work. The early childhood ecosystem is already at a breaking point—and its greatest vulnerability is the underpayment of the workforce.

In 2023, child care workers had a median income of just $25,000 – 45 percent of the median income of all other workers, and the lowest median income of any care work occupation.[2] A recent analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs found that center-based child care workers make on average $13.85 per hour, less than half the salary of a Pre-K teacher in New York City Public Schools ($31.25 per hour), despite similar credentials and training requirements.[3] These disparities and pay inequities have contributed to an exodus of workers and severe staffing challenges.

Compounding the challenges created by underfunded contracts, non-profit early childhood providers are also stifled by dysfunctional procurement processes and regulatory barriers that stifle their ability to sustain services, let alone expand them. Delayed reimbursements force organizations to front payroll, rent, and program costs for months, leaving them cash-strapped and limiting their ability to hire and retain staff or invest in quality. Providers operating across multiple funding streams—including Head Start, Early Head Start, and City-contracted care—face misaligned staffing and program requirements, which complicates expansion opportunities. Better

[2] The Office of the Comptroller, Brad Lander. Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision. (2025). Accessed here.
[3] The Center for New York City Affairs. Dignified Pay for Quality Care: What New York's Family Child Care Providers Need to Thrive. (2025). Accessed here.

alignment across these systems would reduce administrative burdens, unlock existing capacity, and allow providers to serve more children without compromising the quality of care.

We cannot expand our child care system or address the City's affordability crisis if providers are being pushed to the brink of financial collapse and constrained by regulatory barriers. Stabilizing the early childhood sector is both an educational and economic imperative—and it requires a reliable, coordinated partnership with the City.

Budget Recommendation:

In partnership with the Campaign for Children (C4C), we urge the Council to advance legislative and budgetary solutions that stabilize early childhood providers and the workforce and remove barriers for system expansion, including:

1. **Support the Early Childhood Education Workforce:**
    a. **Achieve salary parity** by working with management and labor to ensure salaries and benefits across the sector are aligned with the public school system.
    b. **Establish consistent expectations for pay based on experience** by establishing a defined career ladder for early educators, with appropriate compensation at each rung.
    c. **Set a wage floor** by establishing a minimum wage for child care workers that recognizes their labor and the skills required.

2. **Stabilize provider budgets:**

    a. **Implement cost escalators in child care contracts** of at least 3% to reflect increased costs of doing business. Currently, NYCPS is renewing the Birth to Five contracts for two years without adjusting to reflect increased costs, including rent and utilities.

    b. **Hold providers harmless from enrollment-based penalties,** consistent with protections afforded to early childhood programs operating in public schools. As long as enrollment is managed through a centralized system, center and home-based providers should not be penalized for under-enrollment.

    c. **Immediately process all back payments,** bringing all center-based providers to no less than 75% of their full contract value for previous fiscal years.

    d. **Increase advances to 75% of contract value** to address emerging and serious payment delays for the current fiscal year.

    e. **Ensure on-time payments** by reducing regulatory burdens and fully staffing the Division of Early Childhood Education.

3. **Ease regulatory barriers for system expansion:**

    a. **Coordinate with the Federal Office of Head Start (OHS)** to resolve barriers to participation for Early Head Start providers in blending seats with City-funded contracts, including resolving conflicting staffing ratio requirements, particularly for infants and toddlers under 24 months.

b. **Speed up the background check process for new staff,** so that teachers can begin working in programs faster. This could be accomplished by expanding portability, allowing staff to move between programs without undergoing another background check process.

3. Transportation Needs of Students in Foster Care

Timely transportation is essential to ensuring that children and youth in the foster care system—from early childhood through age 18—can consistently attend school and early education programs, which serve as critical sources of stability. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Fostering Connections Act mandate that local school districts and child welfare agencies collaborate to ensure that students remain in their original schools when they enter foster care or change placements, unless it is not in their best interest to do so.

While the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) Office for Students in Foster Care has made significant progress in addressing transportation needs, considerable challenges remain. Students frequently wait weeks or even months for bus routes to be assigned, creating substantial barriers to their education. The primary issue with the NYCPS Office of Pupil Transportation is the excessive wait time between requesting a route and actually being assigned one. To mitigate this delay, NYCPS has implemented ride vouchers, but caregivers are unable to utilize the vouchers until they have waited a minimum of 10 days for a bus route.

During this waiting period, an adult must accompany the student. However, since many foster parents are either employed or have other children in the home, the responsibility for transporting these children often falls on child welfare staff. This diversion of child welfare resources is problematic, as it pulls staff away from their crucial roles in supporting family permanency.

At Children's Aid, we have made considerable efforts to ensure that children can attend school, but this has come at a significant financial cost and has led to staff burnout. Staff members often begin their days as early as 4:00 am to transport children to school before continuing their full workday. This not only contributes to staff fatigue but also diverts them from their core responsibilities. Moreover, there are serious safety concerns as staff are tasked with navigating transportation for students during this interim period. For example, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that include transportation as a safety requirement are often transported by staff, putting both the students and staff at risk. One of our Education Specialists was involved in a severe car accident shortly after dropping a student off at school. She was devastated by the thought that the child could have been in the car at the time. The car was totaled, and the employee was out on disability for an extended period.

Additionally, just a few months ago, a new case planner was charged with escorting a child with special needs to school when the child broke free and ran toward a busy intersection. The case planner, understandably shaken by the incident, resigned shortly thereafter. These examples highlight not only the financial burden and the loss of valuable human resources but also the dangers posed by the lack of safe transportation options. It is perplexing that this issue has not been made a priority. This is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a matter of safety.

Financially, while the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) provides a $200 daily transportation allotment, actual costs can reach up to $600 per day, excluding the cost of staff time, and there is often a long wait for reimbursement. In response, Children's Aid is hiring additional staff specifically for transportation and acquiring more vehicles for staff use. However, when bus routes are delayed, both students and the families we serve suffer, as the divided attention of case planning teams undermines their ability to provide consistent support.

Budget Recommendation:

Practical solutions exist: contracting with vetted transportation providers that do not require chaperones (such as Kid Car or HopSkipDrive), using ACS or other city vehicles with escorts, creating a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes, hiring aides to accompany rideshares, or at minimum reimbursing chaperone costs and increasing the daily cap.

We urge the City to invest $3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical moment in their lives.

4. Restore Funding for Essential Education Programs

We are pleased that Mayor Mamdani's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget baselines funding for two essential initiatives that had previously been funded only through this June – preschool special education services and summer programming. However, other important education programs funded through this year only were left out of the Preliminary Budget and are, therefore, at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as soon as this July.

We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF) in calling for the City to extend and baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. These programs include:

- **Learning to Work**, which provides support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan. ($31M)
- **Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED)**, which supports students with intensive sensory needs. ($12M)
- **Infant/toddler (0-2) child care seats in high-need communities** ($10M)—programs that just got up and running this January and represent the first city-funded non-means tested child care for infants and toddlers.
- **Restorative justice**, which helps students stay in school, repair relationships, and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended. ($6M)
- **Mental Health Continuum,** which provides expedited mental healthcare to students at 50 high-needs schools. ($5M)
- **Early childhood education outreach**, which helps families learn about early childhood programs and will be essential as the City launches 2-K. ($5M)

- **Immigrant family communications and outreach**, which helps families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access. ($4M)
- **Student Success Centers**, which allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process. ($3.3M)

The dollar amounts listed above reflect the funding needed merely to maintain the programs at their current funding levels

5. Foundation Aid for New York City Public Schools

Finally, we urge the City Council to advocate for the State to fully fund the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula *and make long overdue changes*. Last year, the limited changes made to the formula resulted in NYC schools getting ***$314M less*** than they would have had the State made no changes at all. Governor Hochul's FY 27 Executive Budget does not make any additional changes to better reflect student needs or reverse the negative impact of last year's changes on NYC schools. Fortunately, the Assembly and Senate one-house budgets include a new weight for students who are homeless or in foster care – with a higher weight proposed by the Assembly – and increase the weight for English Language Learners. We urge the City Council to push to ensure the final FY 27 state budget includes the Assembly's proposed weight (.65) for students who are homeless or in foster care, as well as the increase to the weight for ELLs included in both one-house budgets.

Closing

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for their support of New York's youth and their families. Ensuring that New York City's students have the best opportunities available to them so that they are able to realize their full potential is not only the right thing to do but imperative for the future of New York City. We believe that one way to do that is to invest in schools as hubs of coordinated, holistic programs and opportunities that can give youth that chance to thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these critical issues in the lives of children and families in New York City. Please feel free to contact Annie Nelson at anelson@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.

Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on Education
Chair, Council Member Eric Dinowitz
March 23rd, 2026

Thank you Chair Dinowitz and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of CPC is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

To that end, we are grateful to testify about the issues that greatly impact our AAPI, immigrant, and low-income communities.

CPC serves over 1,000 children and their families through our six day care centers, Child Care Resource and Referral programs, and Child Care Assistance Program. Our Childhood Development Services staff are instrumental in supporting the growth of children of color with disabilities. We were grateful to hear about the historic promise from Governor Hochul to fund 2-Care for two years and we are urging the City to ensure that this commitment is not only fulfilled, but strengthened into a lasting investment. A short-term pilot is not enough: New York families need stability, and that means securing long-term, reliable funding that guarantees 2-Care becomes a permanent part of our early childhood education system.

2-Care would allow New York City families to access free child care as soon as their child turns two, seamlessly extending the model that has already transformed lives through Pre-K and 3-K. Like those programs, 2-Care would offer full-day, full-year care, giving parents the support they need to work, pursue education, and build stable futures for their families. This program would reach tens of thousands of children, ensuring they benefit from early learning opportunities at a critical stage of development, while also helping families remain in New York City and contribute to its communities and economy. Importantly, this is not an untested idea, we already have the blueprint. The success of Pre-K and 3-K shows that when New York invests in universal early childhood education, families respond, children thrive, and the city grows stronger.

Right now, New York families are at a breaking point. The cost and scarcity of child care are pushing parents out of the workforce, forcing impossible choices between earning a living and

caring for their children. Many families are leaving the city or deciding not to build their futures here at all because they simply cannot afford to stay. This is not just a personal crisis for families; it is an economic crisis for New York. In 2022 alone, New York City's economy lost an estimated $23 billion due to child care challenges that kept parents from working or drove them out of state entirely.

We cannot afford to delay action, nor can we rely on uncertain future support from the state or federal government. Investing in 2-Care is not just a moral imperative—it is an economic necessity. By making child care accessible and universal starting at age two, we can keep families in New York, strengthen our workforce, and build a more equitable and prosperous future for everyone.

Thank you so much for your time and if there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy & Research Manager at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE DISABLED, NY

MANHATTAN | 1010 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 301, New York, NY 10018
tel: 212.674.2300 fax: 212.254.5953 vp: 646.350.2681

QUEENS | 80-02 Kew Gardens Road, Suite 400, Kew Gardens, NY 11415
tel: 646.442.1520 fax: 357.561.4883

www.cidny.org

Testimony for the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Education Budget

March 23, 2026

To the Committee on Education:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MSEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

There are several interconnected barriers that contribute to NYC public school students with disabilities being twice as likely to drop out of high school as their nondisabled peers (10.7% vs 4.7%, according to a 2021 National Center for Education Statistics report): lack of accessible curricula and physical school buildings, critical staffing and resource shortages, lack of available seats, significant backlogs in receiving mandated services, and lack of long-term, baselined funding for critical education programs.

Funding programs for a year at a time puts communities in an inherently uncertain position. A program that is only guaranteed for a year is going to have more trouble attracting, hiring, training, and retaining qualified staff. Simultaneously, students and families are asked to rely on the content of programs whose presence they can't depend on. The impact of the uncertainty of how to invest in these programs is felt long before any cuts are made.

We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July – Learning to Work ($31M); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12M); infant/toddler child care seats ($10M); restorative justice ($6M); the Mental Health Continuum ($5M); early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M).

These programs were implemented to provide support for the students with the greatest needs. While the loss will be felt by all students in NYC if long-term funding for these programs is not included in the final budget, students with disabilities will be disproportionately impacted. These students are going to be forced to navigate a school system that is actively reducing outreach capacity despite families consistently reporting being unaware of available resources; a school system that is reducing access to occupational and physical therapies despite families reporting noticeable results in their students when those therapies are available, and a school system that is actively removing stable support for restorative justice and mental healthcare at a time when, according to a 2024 comprehensive report by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 48% of NYC teenagers reported experiencing depressive symptoms, 24% reported wanting or needing mental healthcare within the last 12 months and not getting it, and 9% reported attempting suicide.

We also recognize that beyond these programs, additional investments are necessary to support our students. To that end, **CIDNY also asks that the City include in the budget a minimum of a $100**

million investment to address the shortage of service providers and eliminate the backlog of mandated services impacting thousands of NYC students with disabilities, a **$2 million dollar investment to expand the Travel Training Program** and ensure students with disabilities have more options to travel independently without having to rely on school buses, and **expanded investments in school-based mental health clinics**.

Additionally, we would like to see a greater investment made in improving the physical accessibility of NYC schools. According to the 2023 Advocates for Children (AFC) Report, *Access (Still) Denied*, less than one third of public schools in NYC are considered fully accessible. That means that roughly 69% of NYC public schools are exclusionary to students with certain disabilities, who are then severely limited in their school choice and can be denied access to programs that are not offered in the schools they are able to attend. And for the approximately 43% of NYC yellow school bus riders who have a disability, the lack of accessible schools can mean enduring bus rides that exceed the legal time limit of 115 minutes, since there is no guarantee there will be an accessible school close to their homes. However, the impact of this shortage of accessible schools is not limited to students: it also affects the manner in which parents and family members with disabilities can participate in the education process, and it prevents people with certain disabilities from being hired at two-thirds of the public schools in the city, at a time when NYCPS is reporting significant staffing shortages.

The 2025-2029 Capital Plan currently allocates $800 million to address school accessibility. However, when inflation is taken into account, this amount represents a decreased investment from the $750 million allocated in the 2020-2024 Capital Plan. **We therefore ask that the City allocate an additional $450 million (a total investment of $1.25 billion) in school accessibility projects to achieve the goal of making 45% of schools fully accessible by 2030.**

Finally, we urge the City Council to advocate for the State to fully fund the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula and make long overdue changes. Last year, the limited changes made to the formula resulted in NYC schools getting $314M less than they would have had the State made no changes at all. Governor Hochul's FY 2027 Executive Budget does not make any additional changes to better reflect student needs or reverse the negative impact of last year's changes on NYC schools. Fortunately, the Assembly and Senate one-house budgets include a new weight for students who are homeless or in foster care – with a higher weight proposed by the Assembly – and increase the weight for English Language Learners. **We urge the City Council to push to ensure the final FY 2027 state budget includes the Assembly's proposed weight (.65) for students who are homeless or in foster care, as well as the increase to the weight for ELLs included in both one-house budgets.**

We thank you for your time, and ask that you please take this into serious consideration for the FY 27 budget.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Email: msenack@cidny.org Phone: (917)415-3154

Testimony on the NYC Department of Education Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Citizens Budget Commission (CBC), a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank and watchdog devoted to constructive change in the finances, services, and policies of New York State and City governments.

New York City must close a major budget gap; it should do so by shrinking spending that does not reduce critical services. School spending comprises the largest share of the budget. It presents significant opportunities to save money without reducing services or equity.

The number of school-age children in New York City and enrolled in NYC public schools is declining due to falling birth rates and the outmigration of families with young children. These trends accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, though they began well before. Enrollment is projected to continue declining as these trends stabilize but persist. Consequently, public schools are now less crowded, with fewer students and smaller classes.

This provides City lawmakers the opportunity to rationalize school budgets, saving money without shortchanging students or schools by allocating resources based on actual enrollment.

Specifically, the City should:

- Fund schools based on actual enrollment and student need today, which would save $400 million;
- Merge schools whose enrollment has shrunk so much they require disproportionate administrative overhead, beginning with a close review of the 500 schools under 300 students, as of school year 2022-23;
- Get relief from the State class size reduction mandate, which would save $1.2 billion; and
- Pause construction of new schools until administrative actions have been taken to increase utilization of existing schools.

Before the State's Class Size Reduction mandate was enacted, the City already had reduced class sizes in the early grades in high-need schools, which is where the evidence of benefit is strongest. As a result, the mandate primarily drives taxpayer resources to low-

need, high-demand schools—many of which are in high demand precisely because they are high performing. In school year 2024-2025, $170 million had to be directed to the lowest need quartile of schools. This is an ineffective use of resources.

The City could save at least $1.2 billion annually if the State rescinded the mandate. As of November 2025, DOE reported fiscal year 2026 class size reduction expenditures of $640 million; the City increased fiscal year 2026 spending on class size reduction $543 million, to $1.2 billion, as of the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. Projected funding for fiscal year 2027 is $400 million higher, at $1.6 billion.

Furthermore, the State should extend mayoral control for four years, as proposed by Governor Kathy Hochul. Mayoral control without the class size mandate would allow Mayor Mamdani and Chancellor Samuels to use the resources as they see fit to improve outcomes and student performance.

Critical data on the school age population, migration, and enrollment are informative:

- Total enrollment, including public, private, charter schools, and home instruction declined by 118,137 students (9 percent) between school years 2014–15 and 2023–24;
- Public school enrollment decreased by 163,046 (17 percent) between school years 2014-15 and 2023-24, private school enrollment decreased by 20,571 (9 percent), while Charter school enrollment increased by 59,384 (71 percent), and home instruction increased by 6,096 (166 percent);
- If the trend holds steady, public school enrollment will shrink by another nearly 70,000 students by school year 2033-34;[1]
- The number of NYC residents giving birth decreased 28,652 per year between 2000 and 2022; and
- Families continue to move out of New York City before their children start first grade:
    - For school year 2024-25, only 83.1 percent of children born in New York City 6 years earlier enrolled in first grade, compared to 91.3 percent entering first grade 10 years earlier, in school year 2014-15.

School enrollment trends should drive decisions about school funding, location, and size. Since school year 2020-21, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has "held schools harmless" when their enrollment declines. This means that even as school enrollment goes down, school budgets do not.

Over five years, the budgets of shrinking schools have become increasingly disconnected from enrollment. The City needs to right this ship and reestablish weighted student funding as the primary allocation method for school budgets.

If the City were to resume funding schools based on the number and needs of the schools' students, it would likely save $400 million annually, the amount allocated to schools as "hold harmless" funding in school year 2025-26.

Over time, more school buildings are severely underutilized. In school year 2022-23, 380 schools were below 60 percent capacity, down from 187 schools in school year 2014-15.

Furthermore, many schools have shrunk to levels that are pedagogically and operationally ineffective; these schools should be consolidated or closed. In school year 2022-23, 803 schools, roughly half of all schools, had fewer than 400 students; 241 schools were below 200 students. Small schools with fewer than 400 students had the highest per-student costs, averaging $18,294, compared to $13,613 in medium-sized schools (400–800 students) and $11,284 in large schools (more than 800 students).

While some schools remain overcrowded, the number that are has declined rapidly—from 653 schools (41 percent) in school year 2014-15 to 441 (27 percent) in school year 2022-23. This decrease in overcrowded schools, increase in underutilized schools, and increase in small schools indicates that the City should stop building new schools at $870 per square foot for the time being and instead rely on administrative actions to assign students to schools and reduce crowding.

[1] This analysis assumes that current cohorts move up through the grades through school year 2033-34 and that incoming kindergarten cohorts for school years 2026-27 through 2033-34 are the same size as the school year 2025-26 cohort.

Testimony of Alice Bufkin, Caitlyn Passaretti, and Jenny Veloz
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Submitted to the New York City Council FY27 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing
Education Committee
March 23rd, 2026

For 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systemic change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Education Committee for holding today's important hearing on Education in the FY27 Preliminary Budget.

Early Care and Education

Households across the city face an affordability crisis, with 80 percent of all family households unable to find affordable care, and in some communities spending up to 63 percent of their income on child care, preschool or afterschool care alone.[i] Although New York City has led the nation in introducing universal Pre-K and expanding 3-K, families continue to struggle to navigate the system and access services.

We know from extensive engagement with and surveying of NYC families and communities that the demand for affordable childcare is enormous across the city, and that open seats are a reflection of barriers in access rather than lack of demand. Based on a citywide survey and focus groups with parents and providers, it is evident that families face significant bureaucratic barriers to entry, lack of knowledge of existing programs, and options that do not match families' needs and work schedules. Additionally, the ECE system faces threats due to the ongoing inequity between NYPS and community-based salaries; the burden of unpaid city contracts; and a host of operational barriers. These issues were chronicled in our report, The Youngest New Yorkers.

We appreciate that the City Council and Administration are engaging in discussions on how to address these barriers, and look forward to continued engagement on how to enhance and streamline access to care for children and families.

New funding from the City and State to strengthen 3-K and pilot 2-K programs offers an enormous opportunity to reach more families with the care they need. CCC believes it is critical to approach a path to universal child care with a focus on those most marginalized by our existing system –including children with disabilities, immigrant families, and families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. For too long, children with disabilities have been left behind in the city's effort to expand

access to care. At the end of May 2025, more than 7,000 preschoolers with disabilities were waiting for one or more of their services in New York City.[ii] We are grateful that the FY27 Preliminary Budget baselined $70 million for preschool special education services, evaluations and staffing. This will be critical for reducing waitlists for services, which are currently in violation of the legal rights of children with disabilities.

We urge the Administration and the Council to ensure the needs of children with disabilities are prioritized in the City's current and future ECE programs. This includes thoughtfully integrating EI services and EI providers into the new 2-K expansion sites. More generally, we urge the administration to lean on data to ensure expansion efforts prioritize children who face the most risks and barriers.

As a steering committee member of the Campaign for Children, we urge the City Council and Administration to restore and baseline the following ECE programs in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- **$5 million for ECE outreach**, ensuring families are receiving the information they need to make informed decisions regarding ECE programs
- **$10 million for Infant and Toddler Child Care pilot,** expanding child care access to families with children 0-2 years old in high need neighborhoods

We also urge the Administration and City Council to implement the following recommendations to ensure the path to universality:

- Create pay parity for the ECE workforce, including by:
  - Expediting payments of collectively bargained salary increases,
  - Bringing salaries and benefits in contracted ECE programs to parity with their counterparts in public schools,
  - Adjusting rates in home-based programs to allow providers to earn salaries at parity with public school salaries, and
  - Instituting longevity differentials for ECE workforce in line with comparable roles in public schools
- Prioritize those most marginalized by our existing ECE system, including children with disabilities, immigrant families, and families in shelter or other temporary housing.
  - Ensure that staff at community-based preschool special education programs are included in the recent labor contract agreement enhancements
  - Ensure Early Intervention and developmental supports are thoughtfully integrated in the City's 2-K expansion.
- Continue working with the State to ensure sufficient funding for child care vouchers and prepare to address shortfalls with city funding.
- Continue to convert school-day, school year seats to extended day, year round ECE seats to increase options for families with young children
- Strengthen the Family Child Care workforce by implementing funding and administrative reforms, recognizing that the FCC workforce is the backbone of infant and toddler care
- Allow for providers to directly enroll participants in ECE programs to streamline the process and allow more direct access to service

- Strengthen the care system for all children by strengthening access to afterschool and summer programs for children age 6-12.

Restore Funding for the K-12 Education System

We are pleased that summer programming was funded and baselined in the FY27 Preliminary Budget. Unfortunately, many other crucial education programs are only funded through the end of June and are at risk of being eliminated if they are not restored and baselined.

CCC joins the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding urging the City Council and Administration to ensure the following education programs are extended and baselined in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- $31 million for Learning to Work
- $12 million for Sensory Exploration, Education and Discovery (SEED)
- $6 million for Restorative Justice
- $4 million Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach
- $5 million for Mental Health Continuum
- $3.3 million Student Success Centers

Ensure Transportation for Youth in Foster Care

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, NYCPS currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to students in foster care. It can take weeks or even months for NYCPS to arrange bus service, causing significant disruptions for students in foster care In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

The City should invest $3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical time.

Enhance Students' Access to Community-Based Services Provided through School-Based Mental Health Clinics (SBMHC)

Schools play an essential role in meeting the behavioral health needs of children, yet New York City's approach to addressing the social-emotional needs of students in schools has often been fragmented and insufficient. Far too many students experiencing an emotional crisis are still sent to emergency rooms, subjected to police intervention, or punished with disciplinary practices such as suspension.

Schools need the resources and training necessary to support the mental health of all students, rather than relying on punitive and traumatizing responses to student behavior. We urge you to take the following actions in the budget to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of students.

Citizens' Committee for Children of NEW YORK

Article 31 School-Based Mental Health clinics provide on-site services to children during the school day, including diagnosis, psychiatry, and individual and family counseling. SBMHC staff work closely with school staff to identify children in need and coordinate services. They engage the whole family and can serve family members at their community location. SBMHCs provide crisis mental health services, ensuring children receive a compassionate response when they are in crisis and reducing the use of suspensions, detentions and punitive measures.

These clinics are primarily funded by Medicaid and, when available, private insurance. However, funding is deeply insufficient. For example, Medicaid does not cover services to children without a diagnosis, and clinics are not reimbursed for services provided to children without health coverage. Other essential supports that clinics can offer schools – such as mental health education and training for staff, de-escalating a child-in-crisis scenario to prevent law enforcement involvement, and consulting on specific behavioral supports for classrooms – are not reimbursable through the Article 31 SBMHC model.

A $3.75 million investment would enable up to 50 SMHC to provide the types of comprehensive wraparound services necessary to support students' mental and social-emotional needs . Flexible funding to meet the specific needs of schools could include hiring an after school social worker for the clinic; hiring a behavioral specialist to consult with clinic staff several times each week; hiring a family/peer support worker; hiring a clinician that specializes in working in schools and advising on behavior supports for students; and numerous other targeted interventions designed to complement the school-based mental health clinic model.

We urge city leaders to invest $3.75 million to expand school-based mental health clinic services in up to 50 clinics. Ultimately, we recommend a long-term goal of expanding funding to all SMHC's in the city.

State Advocacy for Foundation Aid

We echo the call of our partners within the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding and urge the City Council and administration to join our advocacy in ensuring the Foundation Aid Formula is updated in a manner that will support NYC students. After last year's budget, NYC schools are slated to receive $350 million dollars less than they would under the current formula. In their own One House budget proposals, the State Senate and Assembly both included two updates to help improve the funding formula which would increase resources to NYCPS:

- Adding funding for each student who is homeless or in foster care, and
- Increasing the amount of funding districts receive for each student who is an English Language Learner (ELL).

We urge city leaders to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure these changes are included in the final state budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

[i] Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2023). "CCC Brief: From Birth to Age 12. The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City." https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2023/10/CCC-From-Birth-to-Age-12-Child-Care-Affordability-and-Cost-Burden.pdf

[ii] AMNY (July 2025). "With new funding, advocates and City Council seek greater support for preschoolers with disabilities." https://www.amny.com/news/new-funding-advocates-city-council-seek-support-preschoolers-disabilities/

CITY YEAR NEW YORK
Annie Kessler, Executive Director
180 Maiden Lane, Suite 2501
New York, NY 10038
PHONE 646.330.4160
fax 212.647.9744
cityyear.org/newyork

Testimony of Annie Kessler

Executive Director, City Year New York

New York City Council Committee on Education

March 23, 2026, 9:30 AM

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, committee members, and advocates. My name is Annie Kessler, and I'm proud to serve as the Executive Director for City Year New York (CYNY) and to be testifying before this committee. CYNY expands educational and economic opportunities for children and young adults. Powered by the AmeriCorps national service program, we recruit 18–25-year-olds to serve as Student Success Coaches in systemically under-resourced NYC public schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about CYNY's impact, challenges, and opportunities for students and young adults in NYC.

Background

For over 20 years, talented young adults have joined City Year New York, helping to build connections with communities and students, creating psychologically safe classroom spaces, engaging students in personally meaningful activities in which students have both "voice" and "choice," and helping students to build social and emotional competence. We have a strong and collaborative relationship with New York City Public Schools to further advance and support the Community School strategy — which transforms schools into hubs where educators, community members, families, and students work together to strengthen students' learning and healthy development. The Community School strategy integrates well with CYNY's Whole School Whole Child (WSWC) model that directly addresses the impediments that impact a child's learning and development. Students have experienced heightened levels of stress and trauma because of the pandemic, which is a clear enough reason why we need to employ sustainable, holistic approaches to support their learning and development robustly.

Impact

Our AmeriCorps Members, who we train to become Student Success Coaches, help foster a social-emotional learning environment to improve student attendance, behavior inside and outside the classroom, and coursework. As a former City Year Student Success Coach, Program Manager, and School Partnership Director in the Bronx, I've seen firsthand the systemic challenges faced by the communities we serve. That is why we intentionally employ our WSWC model in communities that have experienced under-investment.

Today, we are proud to be the lead Community School provider for 15 schools across New York City, with a strong presence in the South Bronx, East New York, and East Harlem. The impact of our work is clear: a 2020 Johns Hopkins University study found that the more time students spend with AmeriCorps

CITY YEAR NEW YORK
Annie Kessler, Executive Director
180 Maiden Lane, Suite 2501
New York, NY 10038
PHONE 646.330.4160
fax 212.647.9744
cityyear.org/newyork

Student Success Coaches, the better their academic, social-emotional, and attendance outcomes. Previous studies show that schools that partner with City Year are two-to-three times more likely to improve in English Language Arts and mathematics than similar schools without City Year. In a 2022 working paper, Vanderbilt and RAND researchers found that New York City's Community Schools Initiative, which includes partners like CYNY, led to meaningful gains in student attendance and academic achievement.

CYNY is also a proud member of the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence, which works to champion and strengthen the Community School strategy, and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF), which advocates for adequate and sustainable city investments in all New York City public schools.

Community Schools Support

Over the last several years, the City has expanded the Community Schools initiative, which currently stands at 419 community schools. We are grateful to our city leaders for their commitment to Community Schools, including their decision to baseline $14 million in Fiscal Year 2026, maintain funding in Fiscal Year 2027, and engage providers as collaborative partners in advancing student success and family engagement. At the same time, ongoing challenges, such as unstable federal and state funding, inefficient contracting and payment processes, and staffing gaps within the Office of Community Schools, continue to complicate implementation and affect service delivery for students and families.

In this critical period for young people and communities, New York City must continue to make investments in the Community Schools strategy. To strengthen and grow the Community School strategy, we urge the Administration to protect City funding, expand the Office of Community Schools from 20 to 28 staff (15:1 program manager-to-provider ratio) to better support providers and reduce contract and payment delays, and bring community-based organizations to the table as partners in rethinking contracting and procurement ahead of FY2028. These changes would ease financial strain on nonprofits and allow providers to focus on supporting students and families. We also recommend expanding the model thoughtfully by adding 100 elementary Community Schools by 2028.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to call out other ways we can all work together in the near term:

- First, **strengthen the Community School strategy** by developing a permanent, long-term sustainable funding solution to ensure our students continue to receive the full suite of services currently offered through this holistic approach to learning and development.
- **Collaborate with State leaders** to strengthen education funding **by fully funding and updating Foundation Aid** to better reflect student need—including added weights for students experiencing homelessness, foster care, and English Language Learners—and by establishing a dedicated Community Schools funding stream in the State budget. A new categorical investment (such as the proposed $100–$105 million) would help target resources toward core support, expand access statewide, and avoid funding structures that limit growth or reinforce barriers.
- Third, **partner with CYNY**: We are a data-driven organization constantly learning and innovating to serve our students and corps members better. We are eager to support and ready to partner with the Council and others testifying today.

AmeriCorps | NATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNERS | NATIONAL PARTNERS

CITY YEAR NEW YORK
Annie Kessler, Executive Director
180 Maiden Lane, Suite 2501
New York, NY 10038
PHONE 646.330.4160
fax 212.647.9744
cityyear.org/newyork

There is a saying that "today's problems were the solutions of yesterday." Whatever actions the Council takes to ensure community schools are well-equipped, we urge you to reach a timely solution that tries the best it can to mitigate future problems.

With gratitude and in service, thank you.

Annie Kessler

Annie Kessler

AmeriCorps | NATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNERS | NATIONAL PARTNERS

Good afternoon. My name is Emmanuel Novy and I am here today in support of New York City's youngest learners.

I stand with Literacy in Community and City's First Readers, working closely with children ages 0 to 5 and their families, helping ensure that our youngest New Yorkers enter kindergarten ready to learn, thrive, and succeed.

The early years—from birth to age five—are some of the most critical in a child's development. This is when language, literacy, and social-emotional foundations are built. When we invest in children during this window, we set them up for long-term success in school and in life.

Through my work and advocacy, I have seen firsthand how access to early literacy programs, family supports, and high-quality early learning opportunities can change the trajectory of a child's future. These programs don't just benefit children—they strengthen families and communities.

That's why I'm here today urging the City Council to ensure continued support for essential education programs that are set to expire in June 2026. These are not optional supports—they are foundational investments in equity.

We understand that the Council's regulatory authority is limited. However, the Council plays a critical role in oversight and can compel transparency and reporting that helps ensure these programs are reaching the communities that need them most and delivering meaningful impact.

If we are serious about closing achievement gaps, we must start early. We cannot wait until students are already struggling. We need to meet them—and their families—where they are, from the very beginning.

Our youngest learners cannot advocate for themselves, so it is our responsibility to speak up for them. I also encourage others—parents, educators, and advocates—to take action by testifying, submitting written comments, or joining the rally in support of equitable education funding.

Our message is clear: invest early, invest equitably, and invest consistently in the future of our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

City's First Readers
An initiative of the New York City Council

5030 Broadway, Suite 641, New York NY, 10034
212-620-5462 | cfr@lincnyc.org
www.citysfirstreaders.com

The New York City Council
Preliminary Budget – Education Hearing Testimony
March 2026

PlayReadVIP at NYU Grossman School of Medicine (New York University) has been a proud partner of City's First Readers since 2014, and we have enthusiastically participated in this collaborative effort to provide New York City children and families with the early literacy skills and developmental support they need to be ready for school.

The early years—from birth to age five—are some of the most critical in a child's development. By age 3, 80% of a child's brain is developed. This is when language, literacy, and social-emotional foundations are built. When we invest in children during this window of development, we set them up for long-term success in school and in life. Prevention today is far more effective than intervention tomorrow, and investments in early childhood yield some of the highest returns in public policy.

Through my work, I have seen firsthand how access to early literacy programs, family support, and high-quality early learning opportunities can change the trajectory of a child's future. As an evidence-based parenting program, PlayReadVIP is delivered in pediatric primary care settings—one of the most universal points of access for families with young children. Sessions that are led by trained PlayReadVIP Coaches have been shown to improve early literacy, early math skills, and self-regulation, all of which are core predictors of long-term academic success.

In addition, we have developed and piloted an adaptation of PlayReadVIP for the family childcare setting and are currently conducting research on delivery within this unique environment that many New York City families rely on. As New York moves forward with universal childcare and expanded early literacy access, it is essential to invest not only in services for children, but also in support for the caregivers and adults in their lives. Supporting adults is one of the most effective ways to strengthen outcomes for children. In the absence of comprehensive early childhood infrastructure at the federal, state, and city levels, the work of City's First Readers and its partners is more critical than ever. CFR partners operate in every Council district, with many programs intentionally designed to reach families in high-poverty neighborhoods and support our most vulnerable communities.

That's why I am urging the City Council to ensure continued support for essential education programs that are set to expire in June 2026. These are not optional supports— they are foundational investments in equity. We understand that the Council's regulatory authority is limited; however, the Council plays a critical role in oversight and can compel transparency and reporting to ensure these programs are reaching the communities that need them most and are delivering meaningful impact.

If we are serious about closing achievement gaps, we must start early. We cannot wait until students are already struggling—we need to meet them, and their families, from the very beginning. Our youngest learners cannot advocate for themselves, so it is our responsibility to speak up for them.

We respectfully urge your continued support and approval of the proposed $10 million investment in City's First Readers for FY2027. This funding will allow partners like PlayReadVIP to expand our reach and serve more families across New York City. Our message is clear: invest early, invest equitably, and invest consistently in the future of our children.

On behalf of PlayReadVIP and the families we serve, thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to New York City's youngest learners.

Submitted by

Nicole Kesoglides, MA
PlayReadVIP National Center, New York University

City's First Readers
An initiative of the New York City Council

COALITION FOR
Community School
Excellence

The Coalition for Community School Excellence Testimony: FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing, Committee on Education

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify on the Mayor's Preliminary Budget related to the New York City Public Schools. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Coalition for Community School Excellence. The coalition is a network of advocates and nonprofit partners committed to sustaining and strengthening the Community School strategy in NYC.

CCSE is grateful to the City Council, the new mayoral administration, and NYCPS leadership for recognizing the value of the strategy and for embracing non-profit providers as true partners in advancing the Chancellor's priorities.

The Community School strategy is uniquely poised to help meet the needs of all families in New York City, including those most historically neglected, because the strategy, is

1. Centered on Community and Family Voice,
2. Time-Tested and Evidence Based,
3. Responsive to the Most Pressing Community Needs,
4. Built with Infrastructure for Long-Term Change,
5. And, cost effective and offers significant return on investment.

While the Community School strategy has grown tremendously in recent years, as there are now 419 schools across the city, and shown proven results, the system still faces barriers. Barriers include federal and state funding instability, inefficient contracting and data systems, and understaffing at the Office of Community Schools (OCS) to meet the growing demand around technical assistance, evaluation and procurement.

Strategic investment in the strategy at the city level will fortify community schools, and allow students to continue to be served for generations to come. Specifically, the city should protect funding, strengthen existing systems and partnerships, and invest in infrastructure and expanding access.

To strengthen and expand the Community School strategy, we urge the administration and the Council to prioritize the following actions:

- Expand OCS's headcount from 20 to 28 full-time positions, and work toward a 15:1 program manager-to-provider ratio. This investment would help stabilize partnerships, address persistent contract and payment delays, and provide more targeted support to providers. The addition of one or two dedicated data analysts would further strengthen the system by improving data collection, supporting resource mapping, and ensuring fidelity to the Community School model while better measuring impact.
- Engage Community based organizations and nonprofits as true partners to reimagine the contracting and procurement processes for when contracts expire in FY2028. Nonprofits and community based organizations must work alongside OCS to help design a system that addresses longstanding challenges, including lengthy contract registration timelines, delayed payments, and administrative barriers. These inefficiencies place unnecessary financial strain on nonprofits and divert focus away from service delivery.
- Expand the amount of Community Schools, while maintaining fidelity to the strategy.

City-level action should be paired with action at the state-level. We also urge City leaders to partner with State leaders to advocate for a dedicated categorical funding stream for community schools in the final state budget, which was included in the Senate and Assembly one house bills at $105 and $100 million. Further, the Foundation aid formula must be fully funded and updated to reflect the needs of all students in New York City. We urge the City Council to push to ensure the final FY 27 state budget includes the Assembly's proposed weight (.65) for students who are homeless or in foster care, as well as the increase to the weight for ELLs included in both one-house budgets. These changes would direct hundreds of millions of additional dollars to New York City schools and better equip Community Schools to serve their students.

At this critical moment for New York City's students and families, the City must reaffirm its commitment to community schools. By strengthening infrastructure, stabilizing funding, and expanding access, we can ensure that community schools continue to serve as anchors of stability, opportunity, and equity for generations to come.

For the record we are including our 2026 Mayoral Transition document.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony, and please feel free to contact Violet Lahive at violet.lahive@nycccse.org with any questions regarding this testimony.

Coalition for Equitable Education Funding

Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: Fiscal Year 27 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed budget. My name is Gray Burce, and I am a senior at School of the Future High School. Today, I am testifying on behalf of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, a group of more than 120 organizations advocating for the resources needed to ensure every student receives a high-quality education, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.

We are pleased that Mayor Mamdani's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget extends and baselines funding for two essential initiatives — preschool special education services and summer programming. However, the Preliminary Budget leaves out funding for other critical education programs that are currently benefiting thousands of NYC students and their families. The following programs are funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as soon as this July:

- **Learning to Work**, which provides support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan. ($31M)
- **Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED)**, which supports students with intensive sensory needs. ($12M)
- **Infant/toddler child care seats in high-need communities**—programs that just got up and running this January and represent the first city-funded non-means tested child care for infants and toddlers. ($10M)
- **Restorative justice**, which helps students stay in school, repair relationships, and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended. ($6M)
- **Mental Health Continuum,** which provides expedited mental healthcare to students at 50 high-needs schools. ($5M)
- **Early childhood education outreach**, which helps families learn about early childhood programs and will be essential as the City launches 2-K. ($5M)
- **Immigrant family communications and outreach**, which helps families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access. ($4M)
- **Student Success Centers**, which allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process. ($3.3M)

We call on the City to **baseline funding for these programs** in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, so that students and families will know they can continue relying on these programs in future years, and to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who

have the greatest needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

NYC Council Committee on Education
FY 27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Monday, March 23th, 2026

Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and the Committee on Education, for offering an opportunity to present testimony on the city budget in relation to the city schools and wrap-around services delivered through CBO partners in close partnership with schools to meet the academic and holistic needs of NYC students and their families. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, works in partnership with the city and state to deliver wrap-around services within schools, early care and learning programs, and the wider communities that we serve across NYC, through and beyond our contracted programs and services. Our continued mission is to combine education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age.

Overview of Our Services

CHCF's Early Care and Education team supports childcare and early learning programs, and family access to childcare (birth through school-age) in our work as a Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency[1] and as a Family Child Care Network under New York City Public Schools Division of Early Childhood Education. CHCF additionally engages providers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), supporting the nutrition of children in the communities through their child care program, with an emphasis of healthy eating through cultural foods.

Our Youth Development team delivers after-school programming in partnership with three schools in the Bronx and career and college readiness programming to high school juniors and seniors at four schools in Manhattan and the Bronx. Above and beyond the academic supports we offer in our school-based programs, we support mental health and social emotional development, student interest and career exploration, and connection to additional resources and opportunities beyond the school walls.

Our Social Services team oversees direct supports and services at one of the hotel-based shelters for un-housed families and asylum-seeking families in Long Island City, ensuring culturally and linguistically responsive and trauma informed support to newly arrived families navigating complex city systems.

Finally, our Community Empowerment Department enhances our general delivery of comprehensive supports in direct program spaces, expanding the reach of our agency services and supports beyond these physical spaces into the surrounding communities, addressing several issues, reflective of the needs of the families and communities (i.e. housing, immigration, food access, healthcare access, etc.).

[1] NYC Child Care Resource & Referral Consortium. https://nyccrr.org/

School-Based Programming & Educational Equity

During a school year, CHCF has historically provided after school programming at three different schools in the Bronx, with a typically-funded capacity to reach over 500 students, and by extension delivering resources and services to their families. During the 2024-2025 school year, CHCF served 207 students through their afterschool programs at P.S. 59, P.S. 226, and P.S. 279. The over 50% loss in capacity was as a result of the New York State creating the LEAPS program – a merging together of the former Advantage Afterschool and Empire Afterschool programs – as a means of eliminating inequities that had existed between the two contracts. While the intention of LEAPS was very appreciated by contracted partners, the state did not adequately fund the program to maintain capacity in existing, high-quality programs while also expanding capacity in other regions of the state. CHCF, along with roughly 200 organizational partner programs, was approved as a contractor to deliver LEAPS services, but received no funding to do so. You can see the overall impact on New York City afterschool capacity through an analysis provided by United Neighborhood Houses, linked in the footnotes.[2]

While we continue to advocate with state leaders – and urge city leaders to also uplift the need for restoring lost capacities across city districts – we remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering high-quality, culturally responsive programming within our capacity, as well as delivering wrap around services to the families in our larger school communities. In addition to the over 200 students served through our afterschool programming during the 2024-25 school year, CHCF continued its partnership delivering Summer Rising programming to 165 students.

Above and beyond culturally and linguistically responsive academic instruction, CHCF programs provide comprehensive support that promotes students' mental health and social emotional development, and foster student interest and career exploration. Our academic enrichment curriculum expands upon day-school and school-year learning, allowing students to engage in STEM and the arts through clubs such as robotics, esports, photography, and health and fitness – ensuring that students are inspired and equipped with 21st century skills.

CHCF demonstrates the value-add of connecting community-based partners with schools to comprehensively meet the unique needs of students and their families. CBO partners, like CHCF, strategically coordinate funding and resources outside of school budgets to serve the holistic needs of the students, the school, and the surrounding community. We continue to attest to the critical importance of sustaining programs that strengthen and grow such partnerships between schools and CBOs that demonstrate positive impact on students, families, and communities.

Looking forward, for New York City to eliminate loss of capacity and disrupted access to out-of-school-time programming for students and families, it remains critical that NYC should continue to develop its plans for universal out-of-school-time care as part of its larger universal child care system. Supporting students at a moment that can define their future pathways and long-term success is just as vital as

[2] Connolly, K. (Jan 2026). Change in state-funded afterschool slots (2026). United Neighborhood Houses. Retrieved from: Change in state-funded afterschool slots (2026)

ensuring equitable, high-quality care and learning during their earlier ages, as their brains and bodies develop in such significant ways.

Further, as we continue to work with the state to remedy the harm done to our schools, students, and families with a drop-off in availability of school-aged programming, we bring the issue up here to underscore the need for NYC Council champions to avoid adding to the harm done through loss SACC slots and the subsequent disruption of the supports offered through CBO-school partnerships. The city has been making significant efforts to baseline demonstrably impactful programs for children and youth; the FY26 enacted budget adopted $112M in baselined funds for Early Childhood Education, $55M in baselined funds for Preschool special education classes, $25M in baselined Early Childhood Extended Day Seats, $41M in base-lined funds for Arts Programming, $14M in based-lined funds for Community Schools, $10M in base-lined funds for Teacher Recruitment, and $4M in base-lined funds for High-Impact Tutoring. While CHCF, along with its partners in the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF), celebrated these huge wins in stabilizing the delivery of these programs, the budget still left several programs vulnerable by extending and not base-lining their funds.

CHCF joins our partners in CEEF in calling for adoption of Mayor Mamdani's Preliminary Budget proposed extension and base-lining for preschool special education services and summer programming. In addition, we ask that the Council work to ensure additional critical education programs that are currently benefitting thousands of NYC students, and their families are safeguarded and given long-term committed funding lines. The following programs were left out of the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, remaining at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as early as July 1st:

- **Infant/toddler (0–2) child care seats** in high-need communities ($10M)
- **Outreach on available early childhood education programs** ($5M)
- **Learning to Work programs** to provide support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan ($31M)
- **Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) programs** for students with intensive sensory needs ($12M)
- **Restorative justice** to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being
- suspended ($6M)
- **Mental Health Continuum** to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 schools ($5M)
- **Immigrant family communications and outreach** to help families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access ($4M)
- **Student Success Centers** to allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process ($3.3M)

CHCF additionally continues to join our partners in CEEF in advocating at the state level for adjustments to the Foundation Aid Formula that would deliver more equitable funding for schools and students in NYC. Last year, state leaders failed to make the much-needed changes to the formula – a formula that has remained mostly unchanged since its adoption in 2007 – and as a result, NYC schools received $314M less than they would have received had the formula remained unchanged. Even though

Governor Hochul's budget would fully fund Foundation Aid, it continues to neglect the failings of the formula and will result in a continued loss of resources for NYC's students. We will continue to advocate alongside our coalition partners and the administration on this front, and hope that city leaders will continue to champion this issue.

Early Care and Learning Programming

CHCF holds a Family Child Care Network under the NYCPS DECE, which has grown to support 40 affiliated providers/programs – most of whom speak Spanish as their primary language – to deliver high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive programming to 203 children in FY25 alone. ECE programming supports the healthy development of NYC's children, particularly those who are from communities that have been historically under-resourced; and offers stability to parents who are trying to navigate work and family needs. The value of ECE programs is not only widely documented and evidence-based, but increasingly supported by city and state leaders.

As New York State and City leaders are making historic and substantial commitments to address the child care crisis for families, announcing plans to transition NYS to a Universal Child Care system, we want to take the time to ensure that systems are developed in a way that sustains the existing quality care programs and builds toward an equitable, thriving system that can truly deliver on City and State leaders' promises. The commitments made by the Governor and Mayor certainly deserve to be celebrated for moving the state and city in the right direction towards a universal system. Advocates remain concerned, however, about leadership's preparedness and willingness to meaningfully address such a substantial shift in systems design without causing unintended disruptions to families and the child care workforce who we continue to rely on.

Leaders must address the current system that dictates family access to child care and financial supports, while simultaneously building out towards a universal system that is equitable for all families and incorporates the entire child care sector and workforce.

Specifically, CHCF continues to hold concerns about equitable incorporation of Family Child Care programs, both affiliated and independent, in New York City childcare systems design. While there is a growing awareness of this modality of care, the impact that these providers have in their communities and on the families and children they serve continues to be largely undervalued. This option of care offers a different structure than center-based care and are equally as valuable. FCC programs offer family-based settings in which children in mixed age groups can learn and grow together. FCC programs also are the modality that serve the majority of infants in care in NYC. Families are able to enroll their children starting at 6 weeks and keep them with the same care provider through school age, transitioning from full-time care to out-of-school-time care as they get older. Families can keep their children together in the same program and truly build an extended system of support for their child(ren)'s growth and learning; establishing stability and strong, long-term bonds, which research shows is best for child development. Further, FCC programs more often offer flexible care hours, particularly for families that work non-traditional hours (i.e. beyond the 9-5 workday, weekends, and overnight).

Based on a recent study released by the New School[3], in partnership with the NYC Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium, provider groups, and organizations that support the FCC sector, the FCC workforce in NYC is 94% female, 90% POC, 62% Hispanic, over 70% immigrant. When we discuss the need and desire for culturally and multi-lingually responsive care and early learning, this sector has already been delivering this programming yet are not recognized for the value they have in fostering multiculturalism in New York. These programs are an integral part of their community and often become an extended family for those that they serve. And yet, our city systems continue to struggle to equitably incorporate FCC programs into their systems design, maintaining contracting practices and funding rates that are knowingly unjust.

Not only is this modality of care a preferred choice by many parents, which must be maintained in order to honor a parent's right to select programs that will best meet their family and child's needs; this modality of care is an undisputable necessity in order to deliver on the promises being made to launch 2-K and in ultimately realizing Universal Child Care in NYC. Still, we continue to witness the general marginalization of this sector in decision-making spaces and are receiving signals that maltreatment of FCC programs will remain into new contracting, partnership, and larger systems design, with continued devastation to the sector.

We must learn from the unintended harms of the past universal PreK and 3K programs. As the developed-out systems to deliver Pre-K and expand out 3K, they largely failed to meaningfully incorporate this modality of care into their designs and as a result have stood by while over 1,300 programs closed between 2014 and 2019 (even before the pandemic), as a result of shifts enrollment practices. Only 20% of Family Child Care programs in New York City are affiliated with NYCPS through direct contracts or Networks, with 80% of the sector remaining independent and left to face the unintended consequences of the system on destabilizing enrollment.[4] This tiered level of engagement and access to resources, based on a provider's interest and ability to affiliate with a network is inherently inequitable – not only for the providers running programs, but for the children and families who are receiving care through these programs. Independent providers have continued to deliver high-quality, developmentally appropriate early care and learning programming, despite having resources and supports withheld from them.

This predominantly female, person of color, and immigrant-led sector has also been willfully held to some of the lowest wages across all occupations in New York State. For the 20% of the FCC providers that are affiliated and delivering Early Learn and 3K seats, the rates being paid are barely in line with the state-set market rates, rather than reflecting the true cost of the care they are tasked with delivering. State market rates pay 80% of the reported amount that providers charge families, which is held to levels that families can afford to pay, rather than the true cost of delivering care. With both voucher and contracted care rates held at levels insufficient to cover the true cost of care, providers carry the cost disparity on their shoulders. This, in addition to waning enrollment due to severe CCAP

[3] Melodia, L. and Madge Paredes, A. (Nov 2025). Dignified Pay for Quality Care: What New York's Family Child Care Providers Need to Thrive. The New School Center for New York City Affairs. Retrieved from: https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/dignified-pay-for-quality-care-what-new-yorks-family-child-care-providers-need-to-thrive

[4] Melodia, L. and Madge Paredes, A. Dignified Pay for Quality Care. The New School.

voucher waitlists and NYCPS centralized enrollment, which takes away the autonomy of providers to directly support interested families to enroll and be placed in their program, has left providers with grossly low take-home pay.

The recent New School report found that the median take home pay – based on current enrollment trends – for Family Day Care providers (max. capacity enrollment up to 8 children) is just over $19,000; and for Group Family Day Care (max. capacity up to 16), it is roughly $15,400. When accounting for the additional hours worked by providers, beyond the compensated care and learning hours, the median hourly rate for FDC providers is $4.81, and for GFDC providers is $4.16. If programs were engaged in city systems equitably and supported to maintain "good enrollment" (considered 6 or more children in FDC, and 10 or more children in GFDC), the median take home pay rises to roughly $58,600 and nearly $48,000 respectively, with median hourly rates at $15.52 for FDC and $11.07 for GFDC.

As New York City is preparing to expand 3-K and 2-K, with an expectation that Family Child Care will carry a significant amount of this enrollment, city leaders cannot move forward without caring for this workforce's well-being and stability. On a human level, city leaders cannot stand by and willingly maintain practices that perpetuate inequitable engagement and enrollment practices, which continue to hold this workforce at near poverty wages and drive this invaluable sector out of business. City leaders must not attempt to deliver on their promises by supplementing the cost of delivering and expanding these programs on the backs of the child care professionals who do so much for our communities, NYC families and children, and the economy. On a practical level, we need our current capacity in addition to building back additional capacity to deliver on Universal Child Care in the future. Currently, licensed FCC providers in NYC hold roughly 42% of the non-SACC child care capacity – that capacity has consistently been shrinking as programs have been forced to close over the years.

In addition to the concerns already named, as NYC is positioned to expand 3K/Extended Day 3K, and establish and grow 2K, there are outstanding details needed from the administration, that have yet to be provided, and we want to ensure that budgetary decisions are made with these in mind.

- With the verbiage shift from 2-CARE to 2-K, we want to ensure that 2K is, in fact, treated as child care, meeting the necessary full-day, full-year care for 2-year-olds.
- The administration must be proactive in its efforts to sustain the entire, existing child care sector, particularly if they do not pursue or are not awarded an affiliation or contract with the city.
- City agencies must finally break down the silos in supporting the sector and NYC families and work collaboratively to connect all families in need of care to the least restrictive and most financially supportive option as we address the longstanding malfunctions of the current child care system in New York City and begin transitioning to a truly universal early learning and care system for children birth to 13 years old.
- The administration must collectively and persistently work with the state as FY27 budget negotiations continue, to ensure NYC funding that can clear the current waitlist for CCAP vouchers, which has grown to over 15,000 families; and ensure that they are meeting the required MOE to access all state funds made available to the city.

- The administration must proactively work to ensure that the balance of available affordable care is not further disrupted for families with children outside of the 2-4 age range, particularly infants, and including school-aged, as they have chosen a path of aging down the system, rather than expanding access to meet the needs of all NYC families with children, beginning with those most financially vulnerable.
- The administration must address inequitable enrollment practices so that FCCs can maintain enrollment that supports their financial stability and appropriately compensates (including benefits) the workers.

We want to ensure to support the administration accordingly in addressing the ongoing realities of the child care system and in supporting successful provider engagement as the system expands and shifts to universal.

Finally, CHCF wishes to uplift current concerns within the existing Family Child Care Network Structure, beyond its inability to a support all providers who are interested in joining networks. NYCPS DECE has now extended the current Network contract, which began in July 2020 as a 5-year contact, through 2028. It is worth naming the hardship that networks and providers are being held in, with contract funding levels reflective of 2020 costs in delivering staffing support and resources for programs; in addition to the lack of a Cost of Living Adjustment for the highly qualified network staff who have continued to develop themselves, often times through receiving degrees, advanced degrees, and specialty credentials to elevate their support of the providers and families. The DECE team has been overall inflexible in the budget lines, not allowing network partners to shift funds from other lines to better support our team.

The injustices of the current funding and compensation levels should be addressed, although we understand the difficulties of doing so within an existing contract. Particularly, NYCPS DECE must ensure that network staff are afforded the benefit of recent wins in COLAs for social service providers with the city; and can work with contracted partners to explore creative reallocation of available funding lines to address increasingly inadequate funding levels to support the work being done. In the meantime, CHCF is equally engaged in working with fellow advocates and NYCPS DECE as they consider redesigning and eliminating inequities that were writing into contracts, not only between networks, but between networks and CBOs/providers who directly contracted with the city on Birth-to-Five system.

Additionally, we continue to experience delays in payments under the Network contract, which has created consistent cash flow challenges for the organization. A few examples of administration practices that are counterintuitive to supporting the financial stability of contracted partners and affiliated providers/programs include an invoice review process that raises questions and offers feedback in stages, as they are reviewing the invoice requests, rather than after a full review, which often unnecessarily extends the overall timeline of successfully receiving payment.

As a result of delays in review and dispersal of funds, CHCF has had to prioritize essential expenses, including payroll and critical vendor payments, while delaying or staggering other obligations. We have, at times, had to reallocate other CHCF resources to cover the delay in DOE payments, which shifts

resources away from other services. It has additionally impacted our ability to make timely provider payments, straining our partners and the communities we serve.

Operationally, these administration-caused delays have strained our organizational resources, requiring our financial team to spend excessive time following up on payment status, tracking outstanding items, and continuously adjusting cash flow projections. It also creates uncertainty when planning programmatic spending and budgeting. Overall, while we continue to meet our contractual obligations, these delays have made it more challenging to operate efficiently and maintain financial stability.

These matters must be addressed as we continue on the path to Universal Child Care, as we cannot hope to meaningfully fulfill that promise for families if we allow existing capacity to disappear, and disproportionately collapse program models that excel at meeting the family cultural and linguistic preferences, and at providing mixed age and flexible care options to better support family dynamics. FCC programs are an embedded part of their community and serve as extended support systems for families navigating so many challenges in a city becoming more and more unaffordable to live in. We believe that NYC can do better, and advocates, providers, and families are ready to work in partnership with city leaders as we address the crises of our current child care systems and build out towards a universal child care system that works for families and the workforce that is dedicated to providing quality care and early learning for our children.

CHCF is a non-profit organization with a 44-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age. To find out more about our organizational work or to ask questions of the provided testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy for CHCF, at ddemeuse@chcfinc.org.

Testimony of Abbie Watts
Director of School Food Advocacy
Community Food Advocates

Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
Hearing on Monday, March 23, 2026

Chair Dinowitz and members of the City Council Education Committee:

Thank you for your service, and for all you have done to support the school breakfast and lunch programs, cafeteria enhancements, and food & nutrition education throughout NYC.

Community Food Advocates (CFA) leads Lunch 4 Learning, a broad, diverse coalition that, in partnership with the City Council, successfully advocated for Universal Free Meals in all New York City public schools in 2017. With the support of this Council, we secured $275 million in the Capital Budget for middle and high school cafeteria renovations currently underway across the city. As a coalition, we advocate for policies, initiatives, and innovations that enhance the school food experience and welcome students to participate.

As long-standing partners with the Food Ed Coalition, we join in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to:

- **Expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYCPS.** Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Long-term committed support will secure equitable programming, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators.
- I**nvest in School Food Service Workers.** Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. Efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, food education, and to meaningfully shift school food culture as a vital part of the academic experience require a comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce career pathways, titles, wages, kitchen staff to student ratios, and professional development opportunities.
- **Strengthen Food and Nutrition Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub.** Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York

City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households **($250,000)**.

Thank you for your time,

Abbie Watts
Director of School Food Advocacy
Community Food Advocates

30 YEARS OF DANCEWAVE

March 25, 2026
NYC Council Committee On Education

To the members of the Committee,

I am a cultural worker who supports arts education through fundraising and advocacy work. I write today to advocate for the importance of arts education in the education landscape and in our city as a whole.

Dancewave is a 30-year old dance education organization with a community center in Brooklyn and service spanning all five boroughs. Our programs foster a safe and welcoming environment for creative expression, facilitate multicultural exchange that fosters deep community building, open doors for careers in the arts, and promote physical, mental and social wellbeing that contributes to the improved health and vibrancy of our City. We are currently working in close partnership with 50 NYC Schools and counting to bring dance education programming to thousands of K-12 youth across the city.

Thanks, in part, to this committee's focused advocacy and the city's investment, Dancewave is empowered to provide no- and low-cost programming to over 6,000 individuals of all ages and backgrounds each year. With City funding, we are able to ensure that New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds are able to access movement-based experiences that promote well-being, facilitate social and emotional learning and cultivate creatively thinking communities.

As we look ahead to the fiscal year 2027 budget, I join my colleagues in the following requests:

1. **Restore and Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs ($30M).** Volatile funding levels impede staffing, program development, and direct service at small community-based organizations like Dancewave where City funding plays an outsized role. This investment is critical to preserving the city's economy and cultural identity.
2. **Advance Reforms for Contracting with City Agencies.** Specifically target NYCPS' Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) and CASA contracts, to ensure timely contract remittance and payments, accessible processes, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor. Dancewave is currently awaiting $50,000 in reimbursements from DYCD from FY24-on, and must rely on loans and reserves in order to maintain cash flow. This is unacceptable.
3. **Launch Insurance Pilots to Support Teaching Artist Affordability.** Aligned with Creatives Rebuild NY and the Center for an Urban Future, NYC can reduce economic precarity for the arts workforce by piloting a freelancers portable benefits program and a pooled insurance program for smaller organizations. 79% of Teaching Artists do not feel their work sufficiently supports living in or near NYC, yet these workers are crucial to both the educational and cultural landscape of the city. .

Thank you,

Meropi Peponides
Institutional Giving Manager
Dancewave

Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
New York City Council Committee on Education
Submitted by Nicole Touzien on March 23, 2026

Chair Dinowitz and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director.

Dancewave is a 30-year old dance education organization with a community center in Brooklyn and service spanning all five boroughs. Our programs foster a safe and welcoming environment for creative expression, facilitate multicultural exchange that fosters deep community building, open doors for careers in the arts, and promote physical, mental and social wellbeing that contributes to the improved health and vibrancy of our City. We are currently working in close partnership with 50 NYC Schools and counting to bring dance education programming to thousands of K-12 youth across the city.

Thanks, in part, to this committee's focused advocacy and the city's investment, Dancewave is empowered to provide no- and low-cost programming to over 6,000 individuals of all ages and backgrounds each year. With City funding, we are able to ensure that everyone who wants to participate in our programs, can. Simply put, this funding transforms lives.

As we look ahead to the fiscal year 2027 budget, I join my colleagues in the following requests:

1. **Restore and Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs ($30M).** Volatile funding levels impede staffing, program development, and direct service at small community-based organizations like Dancewave where City funding plays an outsized role. This investment is critical to preserving the city's economy and cultural identity.
2. **Advance Reforms for Contracting with City Agencies.** Specifically target NYCPS' Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) and CASA contracts, to ensure timely contract remittance and payments, accessible processes, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor. Dancewave is currently awaiting $50,000 in reimbursements from DYCD from FY24-on, and must rely on loans and reserves in order to maintain cash flow. This is unacceptable.
3. **Launch Insurance Pilots to Support Teaching Artist Affordability.** Aligned with Creatives Rebuild NY and the Center for an Urban Future, NYC can reduce economic precarity for the arts workforce by piloting a freelancers portable benefits program and a pooled insurance program for smaller organizations. 79% of Teaching Artists do not feel their work sufficiently supports living in or near NYC, yet our City relies on these individuals to meet state learning standards.

Thank you,

Nicole Touzien
Executive Director
Dancewave

Committee on Education
New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearing on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 23, 2026

Eve Wolff
Executive Director, Dancing Classrooms New York City

Greetings, Chairperson Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs. I am Eve Wolff, Executive Director of Dancing Classrooms. On behalf of our staff, teaching artists, and the thousands of students we serve, thank you for holding this important hearing.

The Council's support for arts education has been–and remains–essential to ensuring that every young New Yorker, regardless of background, has access to the academic, social, and developmental benefits of the arts.

Through the joyful art and practice of social dances, Dancing Classrooms cultivates engaged learners, collaborative leaders, and inclusive spaces. We are proud to be one of the largest dance education partners to New York City schools. Each year, our professional Teaching Artists bring our culturally responsive programs to more than 12,000 students at over 100 schools and after-schools across all five boroughs, at no cost to students or families. In an educational system where less than 20% of schools have a certified dance teacher, we play an essential role in bringing art to NYC's youth.

But this work depends on a workforce that is increasingly at risk.

New York City has seen a nearly 19% decline in professional dancers since before the pandemic, and 79% of Teaching Artists report that their work does not provide sufficient income to live in or near the city. At the same time, many arts education providers are facing changes in the funding landscape, including widespread reductions in New York State Council on the Arts funding due to continued uncertainty around federal support for the arts and education. Together, these pressures are making it more difficult to sustain the cultural workforce that delivers these critical programs.

Partnerships with organizations like Dancing Classrooms are critical to ensuring equitable access to what many view as the heart and soul of NYC: Arts & Culture. Embedded in our neighborhoods and communities are thousands of arts workers and arts educators dedicated to help our young people succeed. And school leaders need creative solutions, now more than ever, that support their students' well-being so they can be ready to learn, grow, and thrive. Access to dance education in school and after school equips kids against mental health challenges like isolation and low self-esteem. In particular, social dance education offers a powerful antidote to disconnection, fostering empathy, respect, and collaboration in ways that are both immediate and lasting. And like physical education, it can contribute to helping children meet the 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity that health experts say is necessary—and encourage lifelong healthy habits. Programs like ours offer schools unique, and economical, opportunities to achieve multiple student outcomes through a single delivery mechanism.

Principals and teachers have seen how our programs foster creative, academic, and social-emotional skills—like motivation, perseverance, connection, and listening—that help students become engaged learners and successful students. Even our young participants recognize the impact of having a quality dance program as part of the school day. A second grader in Community School District 6, previously routinely late for school, began arriving to school early, sharing that she did so just to dance with our Teaching Artist—and that in dance class she was learning to move her body "*without judgment!*"

These outcomes reflect what we see every day: dance not only supports physical activity and self-expression, it also builds confidence, connection, and a stronger sense of belonging in school. Third-party research has shown that our programs result in a real, measurable boost in the behavioral and social skills kids need to succeed. After experiencing our 10-week program, 95% of students—almost all of them—showed increased engagement and motivation, 89% saw an increase in self-discipline and focus, and 93% strengthened their collaborative and team skills.

However, schools can only pay for about half—or less—of what it actually costs to deliver our programs. The current Department of Education and Department of Youth & Community Development contracting structures severely limit our ability to meet the gap in arts programming for NYC youth. Applying for rate increases and new contracts requires months, or even years, of dedicated efforts, sometimes resulting only in a small % increase to rates which lag behind the rising costs of doing business in NYC. We are not charging ticket prices or class fees to our students, and remain committed to making dance education accessible for all students. That means, however, that we are forced to rely on a patchwork of funding streams, including contracts and grants from the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, Department of Cultural Affairs, City Council initiatives, and more. The limited availability of arts education funding through initiatives such as CASA, that offers few allowances to accommodate for changing student and school needs, has resulted in a system where schools without a history of funding for the arts must simply make do with what they have.

Despite our efforts to close these funding gaps, we are hearing from more and more principals who tell us they can no longer afford to bring Dancing Classrooms to their schools—not because the need has gone away, but because budget uncertainty has made it impossible to plan.

Cuts to arts and arts education funding—or a failure to restore and baseline those funds—put essential cultural partnerships like ours at serious risk. These cuts will hit hardest in schools and communities without alternative funding sources, such as strong PTAs or the ability to pay for private dance classes, leaving the most vulnerable students with the least access to the arts.

The funding decisions you make as our elected council members are the key to ensuring equity and access to the transformative power and defiant joy of creative learning across our schools. And, if we are serious about equity in arts education, we must also be serious about sustaining the creative workforce and organizations who make it possible. To that end, I proudly join my colleagues in the It Starts With the Arts coalition in urging our City Council to maintain its strong support for high-quality arts education, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.

We urge the Council to take the following actions:

Sustain and stabilize cultural funding

- Restore and baseline last year's $30 million investment in the Department of Cultural Affairs to provide long-term stability for cultural organizations.
- Implement annual cost-of-living adjustments so funding keeps pace with inflation and supports fair wages across the sector.

Strengthen arts education in schools

- Restore and enhance the Citywide Support for Arts Instruction initiative to $6 million and work toward baselining this investment to meet growing demand.
- Require schools to dedicate arts funding to the arts by increasing the per student allocation to $100 and making this a minimum requirement, not a recommendation.
- Ensure every school has at least one certified arts teacher and invest in the pipeline needed to

close existing gaps across more than 290 schools.
Update the NYCPS Blueprint for Arts and Learning to reflect culturally responsive teaching and evolving artistic disciplines, ensuring students have access to sequential, high-quality arts education.

Improve transparency and accountability

- Require school-by-school reporting on arts education access, participation, spending, and staffing so policymakers and communities have a clear understanding of where gaps remain and how resources are being used.

Fix contracting systems that impact the arts workforce

- Continue reforms to contracting across city agencies, particularly NYC Public Schools' Multi-Task Award Contract and the Cultural After School Adventures initiative. Current delays of 15 to 28 months in contract renewals, combined with reimbursement-based models, create serious cash flow challenges for organizations and directly impact Teaching Artist compensation and job stability.
- We urge the City to ensure timely contract registration, faster payments, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor.

Support affordability and stability for Teaching Artists

- Explore pilot programs for portable benefits and pooled insurance to address gaps in access to healthcare and retirement benefits. While most Teaching Artists have health coverage, very few receive it through their employers, highlighting a structural issue that contributes to workforce instability.

Invest in cultural infrastructure and equity initiatives

- Improve and reform the City's capital process by increasing transparency, updating public data, and streamlining timelines so projects do not take 6 to 10 years to complete.
- Increase funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color to $8 million to reflect the growing number of organizations it supports and restore flexibility so these funds can be used as general operating support.

For over 30 years, Dancing Classrooms has partnered with NYC schools to bring high-quality arts education to students who would otherwise lack access. But we cannot do this work without sustained investment in both programs and people.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of equitable arts education. I appreciate your commitment to our City and its students. We are proud to partner with New York City to help ensure all young people have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

Day Care Council of New York
Educated Children Are Our Future

Testimony of Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair and
The Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education
Honorable Jennifer Gutierrez, Chair
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 23, 2026

Prepared by Gregory Brender, Chief Policy Officer, and
Shelby Lohr, Senior Policy Analyst

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and Chair Gutierrez, and members of the Committee on Education and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education, for the opportunity to testify. Over the past several years, the City Council has fought hard to save child care centers threatened with closure and to increase the salaries of teachers, directors, and support staff in community-based child care centers and home-based programs.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY envisions a future in which all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and providers and their workforce have the tools and resources needed to deliver it.

DCCNY supports its members and the broader early childhood field through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, workforce training and professional development, and referral services for families seeking child care. Our member organizations operate more than 200 sites across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations contract with the New York City Public Schools, while others rely on child care vouchers issued by ACS and HRA, federally funded Head Start contracts, or private funding. Collectively, DCCNY member organizations employ over 4,000 New Yorkers – predominantly Black and Brown women - and serve children and families citywide.

Early Childhood Expansion

DCCNY has long advocated for universal access to high-quality early childhood education. We are excited that our member organizations will be part of the growth and expansion of the early childhood education proposed in both Mayor Mamdani's and Governor Hochul's budget proposals.

However, these investments will only succeed if early childhood providers and the workforce have the infrastructure needed to operate sustainably. DCCNY looks forward to working with the administration and City Council to ensure that these expansions create stability for early childhood education provider organizations and fair compensation for the early childhood workforce, which has been undervalued for too long.

Stabilize Early Childhood Education Providers

Despite the overwhelming enthusiasm for early childhood education, child care providers continue to struggle day to day to keep their doors open and pay their bills on time. New York City must take action to support the organizations and small businesses that provide early childhood education.

In order to stabilize community-based early childhood education providers, DCCNY offers the following recommendations:

Implement Cost Escalators in Child Care Contracts.

New York City Public Schools is in the process of extending contracts for two years with early childhood education providers who won contracts through the Birth-to-Five RFP. The Birth-to-Five RFP was issued in 2020 and went into effect in the fall of 2021. It includes the City's contracts for Pre-K, 3-K, and Extended Day/Extended Year programs.

The Birth-to-Five contract made significant advances in early childhood education, and we are glad that the Administration has shown a willingness to engage with providers to ensure that the next procurement of early childhood contracts is a success. However, maintaining flat funding levels over the next two years fails to account for many of the

rising costs providers face.

DCCNY urges the City to immediately implement cost escalators of at least 3% to reflect increased costs for insurance, utilities, and other necessities of maintaining child care programs.

Ensure On-Time Payments

DCCNY is grateful to Speaker Menin, Councilmember Gutierrez, and the City Council for the passage of legislation that will provide greater transparency on how quickly contracted early childhood education providers are paid. The City must continue to work to secure on-time payments for providers by reducing regulatory burdens and fully staffing the Division of Early Childhood Education.

Increase advances to 75% of contract value.

Center-based providers with contracts for Pre-K, 3-K, and Extended Day/Extended Year programs are guaranteed at least 75% of the contract value under the Birth-to-Five contracts; increasing the guaranteed portion would improve cash flow and enable more effective planning and budgeting.

Hold providers harmless from enrollment-based penalties while NYCPS controls enrollment.

As long as enrollment is managed through a centralized system, providers should not be penalized for under-enrollment, consistent with protections afforded to early childhood programs operating in public schools.

Center-based and home-based programs should be held harmless for under-enrollment when NYCPS' district schools are held harmless for under-enrollment in their 3K and Pre-K classrooms.

Restore the Birth-to-Two Child Care Initiative

In the FY 2026 budget, the City Council invested $10 million in the Birth-to-Two Child Care Initiative, which funds 240 free, non-means-tested Extended Day child care slots for children 2 years old and younger. Programs began delivering services in January 2026, and demand is high.

While some seats may transition into 2-K seats in several neighborhoods, the need for the program remains strong. This initiative is the only free program for infants for which

many parents qualify, and the only free service for 2-year-old children in school districts outside of the four districts that have been selected for 2-K expansion this year.

DCCNY urges restoration of $20 million for the Birth-to-Two Child Care Initiative, which will allow the program to continue for a full year.

Support the Early Childhood Education Workforce

In every type of early childhood education setting, the workforce is underpaid and underappreciated. The early childhood workforce is overwhelmingly women, and in New York City, it is overwhelmingly women of color. Yet teachers, staff, directors, and home-based providers continue to earn significantly less than their counterparts in public schools.

This means that people who have the skills, knowledge, and education to be great early childhood educators, leaders, and support staff often cannot and do not stay in their roles because they cannot sustain their lives with lower salaries.

In order to address these inequities and ensure that child care provider organizations can attract and retain a quality workforce, DCCNY offers the following recommendations:

Achieve salary parity between the ECE workforce in public schools and community-based organizations: NYC should work with management and labor to ensure salaries and benefits across the sector that achieve parity with the public school system, including longevity increases for veteran educators, staff members, and directors.

Establish consistent expectations for pay based on experience: Establish a defined career ladder for early educators and articulate appropriate compensation at each rung.

Set a wage floor: The city can establish a minimum wage for child care workers that recognizes their labor and the skills required. This would, in particular, benefit teaching aides and staff in other support roles whose salaries are currently pegged to the citywide minimum wage.

Use contracts to drive toward parity across settings: The city can work with labor and management to address inequities in the current collective bargaining agreements. Notably, future contracts should include longevity increases comparable to what UFT members earn and provisions to address the longer day and year that many child care center teachers work. Contracts should include cost escalators to ensure salaries keep pace with inflation and COLAs.

Establish a wage fund: As part of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, DCCNY is advocating for a dedicated State-level fund to increase compensation for child care workers. A fund like this at the city level could close the gap between what families can afford to pay for care and what programs need to appropriately compensate their workforce.

Provide universal health insurance coverage for child care workers: The city could expand health care coverage by providing access to free or very low-cost insurance plans, inclusive of the center-based and home-based workforce. In the past, the city had a health insurance program that CBOs could opt into. The city should revisit this model and determine how to make it more effective.

Expand access to pension plans: A majority of early childhood educators do not have access to employer- or union-supported retirement plans and are unable to save for retirement themselves. There are some publicly supported retirement systems, including the Cultural Institutions Retirement System (CIRS), which already include some child care workers. The city could work with CIRS to expand eligibility criteria, allowing more private child care programs to opt in for their employees.

Provide housing support: City workers, including public school teachers, are already eligible for priority in housing lotteries. However, this priority does not currently include child care workers. The city could set specific priorities within the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's affordable housing lotteries to ensure that child care workers receive the same priority as other essential workers.

Create career exposure and dual enrollment training programs for high school students: NYCPS continues to expand opportunities for workforce development and career exploration for high school students, child care careers should be added to the portfolio. Programs of this type have the dual benefit of attracting new people to the child care workforce while also filling immediate staffing gaps.

Launch a city-funded apprenticeship program: New York City could develop a city-funded apprenticeship program that matches current and aspiring caregivers with existing home-based or center-based programs to provide paid

on-the-job learning opportunities and also matches apprentices with low-cost or tuition-free credential programs. New York already has a robust infrastructure in place to support apprenticeships across sectors. Given the fragmentation of child care and the small scale of most programs, an apprenticeship program would likely need to be driven at the sector level by the city or an intermediary, such as DCCNY, rather than by individual child care programs.

DCCNY also urges New York City to work with New York State to:

Speed up the background check process for new staff

The city must continue to focus on expediting the background check process so that teachers can begin working in programs faster. The city should also explore making background checks portable. Currently, educators must undergo the background check process again if they start a new program, which may deter some educators from staying in the field. There is some precedent for expanding portability; currently, staff can work in different sites operated by the same organization. Moving to full portability would require state action.

Experiment with new credentialing models

Across the country, including elsewhere in New York State, community colleges are introducing new stackable micro-credentials to support current or aspiring early childhood educators who want to enhance their qualifications but may not have the time, budget, or interest to pursue a full degree. With buy-in from the city that micro-credentials could be tied to pay increases for early childhood educators, community colleges and child care programs could work together to develop coursework that addresses specific learning gaps they are seeing in the workforce. For child care workers, this could be a mechanism to build particular skills and be compensated for it.

Create substitute teacher pools

When a child care worker is absent, programs typically have to scramble to maintain coverage. Child care centers that contract with the city can access NYC Public Schools substitute teachers. However, they are required to pay those substitutes the UFT-negotiated rate of about $50 an hour, which is more than centers can afford - and highly problematic internally when their own substitute teachers and support staff earn minimum wage (or $18 per hour, if subject to DC-

37's CBA). Governor Hochul recently announced that funding for the State's substitute pool would only support home based providers in New York City due to DOHMH regulations. New York City could launch its own substitute pool, in collaboration with the state or on its own.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached at gbrender@dccnyinc.org and slohr@dccnyinc.org.

The New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Chair Dinowitz
City Council Hearing on Education
March 23rd, 2026

The City Must Expand and Protect Restorative Justice, School-Based Mental Health, and Immigrant Protections
Testimony of the Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY

Good afternoon, and thank you Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education. My name is Andrea Ortiz, and I am the Director of the Dignity in Schools Campaign–New York (DSC-NY), a coalition of over 25 organizations working to create safe and supportive learning environments in NYC Public Schools. We organize with students, parents, educators, and advocates to expand restorative justice, increase mental health access, and strengthen protections for immigrant communities, while working to eliminate police, surveillance, and punitive discipline in schools.

Public schools should be places where young people feel safe, supported, and able to learn. Yet for many students—particularly Black, Brown, immigrant, LGBTQ+ youth and students with disabilities—punitive discipline and policing create barriers to learning and undermine their wellbeing. Therefore, DSC-NY calls on the City to expand school-based restorative justice, mental health supports, and immigrant protections, and redirect money away from policing into proven safety infrastructure.

We urge the Council to:

- Invest $80 million to hire School Climate Coordinators in 500 priority middle and high schools,
- Baseline the remaining $6 million in restorative justice funding set to expire, and increase funding by another $5 million, bringing the total from $17.6 million to $22.6 million, including adding:
    - $2 million for training and technical assistance, and
    - $3 million to support paid student leadership opportunities in restorative justice.

These investments are achievable. **By freezing hiring for School Safety Agents, eliminating vacancies, and not backfilling through attrition, the City can save up to $90 million in one year to reinvest in these priorities.**

While we appreciate that the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget baselines funding for special education and summer programming, it fails to protect restorative justice, the mental health continuum, and immigrant family outreach, while doing nothing to reduce school policing or surveillance.

A real commitment to safety requires a shift in how we invest. Restorative justice builds community, prevents harm, and creates meaningful responses when harm occurs, but it requires sustained funding, dedicated staff, and integration into school culture.

We also call on the City Council to protect immigrant students and families from President Trump's mass detention and deportation plan, including:

- Strengthening immigration preparedness policies;
- Offering comprehensive trainings for staff, students, and families;
- Enhancing data privacy and security protections; and
- Passing Intro 798 to eliminate the NYPD's Gang database.

Finally, it is clear that Mayoral control has repeatedly failed communities, even under "progressive" leadership, because parents, youth, and community members don't have control over our schools. Mayoral control has been responsible for the expansion of metal detectors, police in schools, bulletproof vests, budget cuts, reversal of integration policies, reversal of CRSE mosaic, creating more charter schools, closing schools, cutting restorative justice programs, and instituting merit pay for teachers. **Therefore, we are asking the city to fund a commission of parents, educators, students, advocates, experts, and researchers, to engage communities in designing a truly democratic school governance system to replace mayoral control.**

New York City has the resources to create schools where young people can thrive. Investing in restorative practices and mental health supports will reduce reliance on policing, improve school climate, and equip students with lifelong skills in conflict resolution and accountability.
We urge the Council to adopt a budget that moves resources away from policing and toward the supports that truly make schools safe, shifting power to school communities—not the NYPD.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Andrea Ortiz
Director
Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY

March 23, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Education
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 – Department of Education

Dear Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this important hearing, and for your commitment to ensuring access to high-quality early care and education for our youngest learners. The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) is a national nonprofit comprised of the leading high-quality multi-site child care providers, state child care associations and education service providers. Collectively our members operate 7,500 child care centers nationwide, serving over one million children. In New York State, our members operate 256 centers, including 84 in New York City, employing 1,917 educators and staff, and with the capacity to serve 8,183 children, 28% of whom receive City or State subsidies.

I wanted to start off by thanking the Department of Education and City Hall for their continued focus on increasing access to child care and early learning for all New York City families. The fiscal year 2027 budget's proposed investment of $1.1 billion for Universal Pre-K and $547 million for Early Childhood Education Investment will go a long way towards ensuring every family of young children has the support they need to go to school or work each day knowing their children are in a safe and healthy educational environment.

Universal Child Care

Currently, 37 ECEC member centers serve 1,300 children through New York City's 3K program, and 36 ECEC member centers serve 871 children through the UPK program. The success of universal childcare that meets the diverse needs of New York families depends on a mixed delivery system that fully includes private and community-based providers alongside school districts. New York City has long relied on a mixed delivery model to expand access quickly, reach diverse communities, leverage existing capacity, and ensure educators are paid fairly. Private providers already operate high-quality programs, employ trained early childhood professionals, operate purpose-built facilities, and serve families who depend on continuity of care, from birth through age five. ECEC strongly urges that any early childhood education expansions and related aid streams explicitly preserve and strengthen the mixed delivery model. Intentionally or inadvertently excluding private and community-based providers would reduce available seats, disrupt existing childcare arrangements, increase the cost of care for younger children, and undermine parental choice—particularly for working families who rely on full-day, year-round care.

Early Care & Education Consortium

Our members were excited for the quick action Mayor Mamdani took to open up the 2K and 3K Request for Information (RFI) in February. Because the last 3K and UPK request for proposal (RFP) process was not rolling and had not opened for approximately six years, many newer programs and those more recently interested in participating in these successful programs have been unable to do so. The demand for child care is dynamic, and our approach should mirror that. For the City to best position itself to provide the highest quality of care, the RFP should be open, with additional seats from current and new community-based programs being added on an annual basis, while continuing to allow programs flexibility in reconfiguring slots. This will allow providers to meet the growing demand and respond accordingly. As Mayor Mamdani has repeatedly stated, this will be an all hands-on deck approach, and we look forward to continued opportunities to partner with the Department of Education to provide high-quality care and education to more New York City families.

Comprehensive Background Checks (CBCs)

In addition to these investments, ECEC appreciates the Department's and City Hall's efforts to streamline and improve administrative processes, including processing times for early childhood educator background checks. Through both the Department of Education and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), background check delays have long plagued child care providers operating in New York City. While the City Council has worked to improve clearance processing timelines by ensuring the departments have the resources, policies, and guardrails in place to improve their systems and increase efficiencies, New York City still lags far behind the rest of the state, as well as much of the country in terms of processing times.

Background checks play a critical role in assuring parents that their children will be safely cared for, and importantly, a teacher cannot supervise a classroom until they receive a clearance (or renewal) from the Department. While we are in very strong support of thorough background checks, the length of time clearances are taking is undermining providers' ability to provide New York City's children with care and quality educational programming, and is significantly worsening the ongoing staffing crisis. In order to meet the city's commitment to expanding access to child care and Pre-K, we must ensure we are building a qualified workforce and have a consistent pipeline of educators to staff these programs.

The delays cause would-be educators to leave the sector, and result in classroom closures and shortening of programs' operational hours, which impacts working parents' ability to find and access care. ECEC supports increased funding to both the Department of Education and DOHMH to ensure adequate staff, technology, and processes are in place to allow for thorough, but efficient, processing of background checks so the City can continue to expand access to high-quality education and care. We applaud recent improvements DOHMH made around portability of CBCs, allowing some clearances to more closely follow the person, as opposed to just being linked to the specific classroom. We hope additional flexibilities around portability will be introduced to further improve efficiencies, while maintaining appropriate safety measures.

Early Care & Education Consortium

New York City can and should be a leader in this space, with robust access to early care and education, and an efficient system that ensures properly screened staff in a timely manner. ECEC stands ready to work with the City Council and City Hall to ensure that New York City's early care and education system remains stable, inclusive, and responsive to families' needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully,

Sage Schaftel
Assistant Executive Director
Early Care and Education Consortium

Board of Managers

Chairman
Thomas H. Remien

President
Thaddeus Gray

Vice Presidents
Wendy Holmes
Dolores O'Brien Miller

Treasurer
Richard E. Kolman

Secretary
Marvena St. Agathe

Lucinda Ballard
Caroline Beshara
Stephanie B. Clark
Ramona Dessouki
William S. Elder
Nancy Larsen Farrell
Andreina Hidalgo
Barclay G. Jones, III
Maureen Kerr
George G. King
Michael R. Lynch
Robert L. Meyer
Ron Miller
Janet Mora
Hon. Eugene Oliver, Jr.
Elizabeth Donnem Sigety
Mrs. Charles F. Smithers
Jeffrey Stein
Steve Thompson
Philip L. Yang, Jr.

Honorary Members
Mrs. Roland W. Donnem
Ms. Christine Janis

Executive Director
Daniel Diaz

Associate Executive Director
Natalie Lozada

***Past President**

3/26/26

Good morning, Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Dontai Nottingham, and I represent East Side House Settlement, a nonprofit serving 15,000 individuals annually across the Bronx and Northern Manhattan through education, workforce development, and supportive services.

We strongly support the Learning to Work (LTW) program and urge the city to restore and baseline its funding. LTW is a critical intervention for students in Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers, especially for young people who are often disengaged from traditional school models and face difficult academic and social challenges. By embedding community-based organizations into schools, LTW provides mentorship, post-secondary planning, and workforce opportunities that help students re-engage and graduate.

Despite the proven success of LTW, funding remains unstable. While funding was restored through June 2026, it has not been baselined. We urge the city to restore the full $31 million and baseline the program to ensure long term stability.

Thank you for your continued support.

Dontai Nottingham

Dontai Nottingham, Director of Government Relations

East Side House

edtrust NEW YORK

Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Education Fiscal Year 27 Preliminary Budget - Education March 23, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the proposed education budget. EdTrust-New York is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to educational equity. We work to attain educational justice through research, policy, and advocacy that results in students of color– particularly Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American students, and students from low-income backgrounds – achieving at high levels from early childhood through college completion.

As the largest district in the state and nation, serving nearly 1 million students, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) is a key focus of EdTrust-New York's commitment to advancing equity-focused educational efforts across the state. Such investments are even more critical this year due to federal funding cuts and attacks on critical educational equity programs. The following are our top priorities for the FY27 budget:

NYC Reads and NYC Solves

Research is clear that two education indicators, 3rd grade reading and 8th grade math proficiency, are strongly correlated with future student success. 2024-2025 state assessments show that both NYC Reads and NYC Solves, which prioritize the use of evidence based instructional materials and aligned professional learning for educators, are beginning to improve reading and math outcomes as ELA proficiency rose over 7 points and Math proficiency rose over 3 points.

To continue this progress, sustained investment in evidence-based literacy and math instruction, robust coaching and professional learning for teachers, and targeted interventions for students will be critical. **We urge the City to commit $200 million in dedicated, baseline funding for NYC Reads and NYC Solves—funding that is protected from annual budget fluctuations. Baseline funding ensures continuity for the professional development, coaching, curriculum support, and family engagement that make these programs work.**

This increased support must address multiple priorities, including:

- Professional Learning & Coaching: Sustained, job-embedded support for educators implementing evidence-based literacy and math instruction.
- Family Engagement: Paid parent ambassadors, culturally responsive communications, and citywide campaigns to build awareness and partnership.
- District-Level Support: Staff in superintendent offices to coordinate implementation and provide coaching support closer to schools.
- Curriculum Selection & Materials: Support for districts to select from approved, evidence-based, culturally responsive curriculum options and ensure access to high-quality instructional materials.
- Pre-K–12 Alignment: Ensuring early childhood programs connect to K–12 literacy and math foundations—building on the administration's commitment to universal childcare and the NYC Reads Together literacy ecosystem work.
- Interventions & Tutoring: Evidence-based interventions and high-impact tutoring—delivered by nonprofit and community providers and paid educators—for students who need to build foundational skills.
- Additional support for Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) and students with disabilities to ensure they have access to the new curricula. For example, some of the current curriculum is still not available in Spanish, let alone other languages, to support the hundreds of bilingual programs throughout the city.
- Focused resources to help teachers provide scaffolding for students with disabilities and MLLs/ELLs in the curriculum.
- Expanded support for Adolescent Literacy to scale up promising initiatives and provide intensive intervention to more adolescents who need support to become proficient readers.
- Addressing the needs of students experiencing temporary housing or educational disruptions by providing consistent high-quality curricular materials across NYCPS, combined with aligned professional learning.

Immigrant Students and Families

At a time of heightened immigration enforcement, the city must continue its longstanding support for immigrants and their families by:

- Extending the City Council's current funding to NYCPS's Project Open Arms (POA) to maintain current partnerships with legal aid organizations, connecting families and students to immigration legal support.

- **Allocating $450K** to expand Dream Squads in additional schools and provide compensation to school-based staff to serve as Project Open Arms Point Persons to extend the reach of the POA office.

- Providing funding for immigrant family communications and outreach to help families receive information about their child's education in a language and mode they can access **($4M**). A portion of this funding should support the district's communication to immigrant families about NYC Reads and NYC Solves, focusing on how to support literacy and numeracy in their home languages.

Multilingual Learner/English Language Learner (MLL/ELL) Education

EdTrust-New York commends the Council's willingness to support the city's MLLs/ELLs. We request the following new investments to significantly improve their academic and literacy outcomes:

- We ask for a **$1.8M investment in high-quality dual-language early childhood education,** allowing NYCPS to open additional bilingual Pre-K programs and provide the necessary training and technical assistance to support implementation.

- The district needs **$3.4M to procure instructional materials for Standalone English as a New Language (ENL)** to improve the quality of language services and expand its current pilot to additional districts with job-embedded training to ENL teachers.

- A **$8M investment would allow NYCPS to pilot a model providing guaranteed co-planning time and co-teaching partnerships** between content area and ENL teachers to both meet mandated requirements for Integrated ENL services and simultaneously improve the quality of language development instruction integrated in core academic subjects.

- **A $10M investment** in poorly performing NYC districts to provide multilingual learner-focused training and job-embedded coaching to support the district's implementation of NYC Reads and NYC Solves. Specialized training will enable teachers to effectively implement high-quality literacy and math instruction to meet the unique needs of MLLs/ELLs.

The NYC Budget should promote a multilingual New York City by:

- **Investing $100K for district high schools** to increase the number of MLLs/ELLs who attain the NY State Seal of Biliteracy each year.
- **Provide $4.1M in dedicated funding** (separate from bilingual education funding) for instructional materials and training for educators to provide heritage and world language instruction in middle and high schools in the top languages spoken at home by NYC students.

Class Size Law Implementation

EdTrust-New York warned that moving forward without adjustments to the state class size law could put fairness and opportunity at risk. New York City Public Schools' own estimates last year showed that nearly $1 billion in additional funding is needed, and that 78 percent of those dollars are projected to go to schools serving more advantaged students. Our prior analysis similarly found that schools serving the highest shares of Black, Latinx, and low-income students are receiving significantly less funding per student.

As a result, we believe the state should adjust the timeline for further implementation of the class size law and the City should re-direct the Mayor's proposed $543 million investment in class size reduction to support the many equity priorities outlined in this testimony.

During this adjusted timeline to get to full implementation, the City should:

1. Work to reach 70% compliance with the law by the 2026-2027 school year, 80% by 2027-2028, 90% by 2028-2029, and full compliance by 2029-2030, with a one year grace period. Ask the State to allow the City to at any point request a pause of this phase-in implementation schedule due to demonstrated fiscal hardship.
2. Create a capital plan to build more schools and classrooms, with a particular focus on elementary schools which is where the evidence is strongest that smaller classes improve student outcomes.
3. Develop a proposal for adjustments to the law and implementation to prevent unintended inequities. A new report released this week by the Urban Institute found that the city's current compliance stands at 64% across all schools, and the schools serving students with the greatest economic need show higher compliance (98.4%) than those with least needs (34.8%). This means to get to full compliance, the city will need to spend billions of dollars in schools that have the least needs. Adjustments must be made to the law to address this unintended consequence.
4. The City should develop a proposal that considers:
    - Limiting implementation in high schools to just core classes.
        - Urban Institute's report notes that New York City has nearly four times as many high school classes (89,580) as elementary school classes (24,579) and more than twice as many high school classes as middle school classes (36,389). Yet, the evidence that smaller classes are beneficial is strongest for early grades, and limited or non-existent for high school grades.
        - High schools have more classes because they offer many elected classes. Limiting implementation to core content classes would ensure that any class size reduction would benefit the content area classes students need to graduate.

- Adjusting the cap for high school classes.
  - Moving from a cap of 34 students to 25 students is a dramatic shift with little evidence to say that 25 students is the right cap for high school classes.
- Any other adjustments to the law that would ensure funds are driven to the highest needs schools.

Foundation Aid

We urge the City Council to advocate for the State to fully fund the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula *and make long overdue changes*. Last year, the limited changes made to the formula resulted in NYC schools getting ***$314M less*** than they would have had the State made no changes at all. Governor Hochul's FY 2027 Executive Budget does not make any additional changes to better reflect student needs or reverse the negative impact of last year's changes on NYC schools.

Fortunately, the Assembly and Senate one-house budgets include a new weight for students in temporary housing or in foster care – with a higher weight proposed by the Assembly – and increase the weight for English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners. We urge the City Council to push to ensure the final FY 2027 state budget includes the Assembly's proposed weight (.65) for students who are homeless or in foster care, as well as the increase (.60) to the weight for MLLs/ELLs included in both one-house budgets.

Baseline Historical Education Programs

EdTrust-New York is pleased that the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget baselines funding for two essential initiatives that had previously been funded only through this June – preschool special education services and summer programming. However, other important education programs funded through this year only were left out of the Preliminary Budget and are, therefore, at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as soon as this July. These programs include:

- **Learning to Work**, which provides support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan. ($31M)
- **Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED)**, which supports students with intensive sensory needs. ($12M)
- **Infant/toddler (0-2) child care seats in high-need communities** ($10M)—programs that just got up and running this January and represent the first city-funded non-means tested child care for infants and toddlers.
- **Restorative justice**, which helps students stay in school, repair relationships, and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended. ($6M)

- **Mental Health Continuum,** which provides expedited mental healthcare to students at 50 high-needs schools. ($5M)
- **Early childhood education outreach**, which helps families learn about early childhood programs and will be essential as the City launches 2-K. ($5M)
- **Immigrant family communications and outreach**, which helps families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access. ($4M)
- **Student Success Centers**, which allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process. ($3.3M)

The dollar amounts listed above reflect the funding needed merely to maintain the programs at their current funding levels.

We join with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to extend and baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. We also join with the coalition in calling on the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Universal Child Care and Child Care Workforce

EdTrust-New York appreciates new childcare investments. However, a universal childcare system cannot succeed without a stable and well-supported workforce. The first three years of a child's life shape lifelong development, and childcare professionals provide vital developmental support during this critical period. Yet they earn less than 96% of workers in other New York occupations. The was a 79% increase in family-based care between 2019 and 2024 and a 43% increase in center-based care. Yet only a 13% increase in average earnings. These low wages are exacerbating an already strained system and threaten to handicap bold child care investments in the future.

We urge the City to enact the following universal child care recommendations:

- **New York City leaders should join the child care community and state lawmakers calling for the State Budget to implement a child care workforce compensation fund** to provide ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage ($1.2 billion).
- **New York City leaders should urge New York State leaders to adopt the Governor's proposed $1.2 billion in new investment in the Child Care Assistance program** and

add the funding necessary to fully meet demand for CCAP/vouchers in New York City as the City and State move toward statewide universal child care.
    - New York City leaders must ensure that New York City meets any matching requirements to draw down all CCAP funds.
    - New York City must act without delay to ensure that no early childhood seats are left empty while children from low-income families are languishing on the voucher waitlist.
    - **It is also critical to note that the voucher waitlist is playing a role in keeping compensation for child care educators low, particularly those working in home-based settings.** A November 2025 report by the New School's Center for New York City Affairs, *Dignified Pay for Quality Care*, demonstrates the extent to which under-enrollment in New York City home-based programs contributes to low-pay. They found that home-based provider average hourly wages in 2023 were $7.33 for Family Child Care (FCC) and $5.98 per hour for Group Family Child Care (GFCC), their hourly wage increased threefold if they had full, or close to full enrollment, to $18.84 and $17.62, respectively. However, only 29 percent of the FCC providers and 51 percent of GFCC providers surveyed had "good enrollment" in 2023. Across the state, licensed home-based providers serve 38% of families receiving CCAP/vouchers, leaving this type of care particularly vulnerable to the impacts of low-enrollment because families are languishing on a CCAP/voucher waitlist.

- **Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest $73 million to launch 2-K in New York City** focusing initially on high-need areas, and ensure that 2-K is implemented in a manner that guards against the loss of infant and toddler seats, with flexibility to adjust the model to a multi-age, community care or other model if these issues arise. Further, it is essential that all modalities of child care—including center and home-based child care providers—are able to fully participate in 2-K.

- **Expand pre-K and 3-K in coordination with full funding of CCAP.**
- **Prioritize communities with high rates of low-income families with young children** for universal projects and 3-K expansions.

Career and College Pathways

With major changes coming to state graduation requirements, it is critical that NYCPS continue their important work to provide students with real world skills and early career insights. To accomplish this, New York City must ensure that all students have equitable pathways to college and career success, particularly students of color and students from low-

income backgrounds. Systemic barriers, including inequitable access to college in high school programs and inadequate emergency financial support in college, limit opportunities for many students. We urge the City to:

- Strengthen supports and emergency aid for students in college, including targeted resources for programs like CUNY's ASAP and ACE
- Increase city investment in college in high school programs and map program locations to identify gaps in access
- Evaluate college in high school programs and student outcomes to guide evidence-based expansion of high-quality programs
- Invest resources in pathways into the teaching profession, particularly for educators of color, including by following the state's guidance to help develop and expand "Grow Your Own" initiatives in New York City, pipelines for school-based staff to become educators, and programs to recruit and retain bilingual educators and special education teachers

School Integration

NYCPS is the most segregated school district in the country. Today, our school zoning is more reflective of red-lined communities in 1930 than any other time. This root cause issue has perpetually facilitated learning and opportunity inequities for decades and stands in the way of holistically advancing the bulk of all equitable policies and practices intended to better serve all the city's children.

We urge the baseline funding of $2 million annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 and continuing for three years, to support the Community School District Diversity Working Groups, as required under Local Law 225 of 2019.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our testimony.

Presented before the
New York City Council
City Council's Committee on Education
Oversight Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chair Eric Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify at today's Preliminary Budget Hearing. I am Janice Weinman Shorenstein, the Chief Executive Officer of Education Through Music.

For the past 34 years, ETM has made **high-quality, in-school music education a reality for 350,000 children who would otherwise have limited or no exposure to the arts.** We do this by partnering with under-resourced New York City schools to create a comprehensive and sequential music program that reflects the needs of the children and then hire high-quality music teachers and place them at a fraction of the cost the school would normally have to pay. This year, we began our first partnership with District 79. ETM works exclusively with Title I schools primarily serving BIPOC children: 95% of all ETM students are students of color, 23% have special needs, and 85% are living below the poverty line.

Access to music education is not equitable. Over half of New York City schools do not have a full-time certified music teacher or staff. When schools, especially those serving low-income populations and communities of color are unable to provide music education due to funding concerns or limited resources, children whose families cannot afford to pursue alternative opportunities are put at an academic, social and development disadvantage.

The benefits of music education are undeniable and far reaching. Research, evaluations, and our school's partners testimony continue to demonstrate that music supports children's cognitive, social, and emotional development in robust and incredible ways:

Music education:

- Builds self-confidence
- Improves social-emotional skills
- Provides tools to manage emotions and heal from trauma
- Increases brain development, memory, and fine motor skills
- Enhances academic performance
- Builds language and communication skills
- Increases discipline, motivation for school attendance, and retention
- Enables self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking

Beyond the general benefits, music has been shown to play a critical role in helping migrants and students from low income backgrounds feel a greater sense of belonging in schools, increasing their engagement and overall well-being.

Our City must invest in clear and sustainable pathways for music educators to enter the workforce to ensure that every student statewide can receive the benefits of a high-quality music education.

Thank you again for your partnership and the opportunity to testify today. Please contact Janice Weinman, CEO at jweinman@etmonline.org with any questions.

TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION – March 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the City Council's Education Committee.

My name is Asenhat Gomez and I am the Senior Director of Programs at El Puente.

El Puente is a 42-year-old community human rights organization that promotes leadership for peace and justice in North Brooklyn and Puerto Rico. Education has been a pillar of El Puente's mission. In 1993, El Puente founded the Academy for Peace and Justice, one of the first U.S. public high schools focused on social justice and later established a Beacon program focused on early childhood development, a Community School, and a Youth Ambassador program in 2015, connecting young leaders with Puerto Rico's self-determination movement.

El Puente knows all too well that the best model for providing our children with a holistic education is community schools.

I am writing to strongly urge the City Council to prioritize and expand baseline funding for all New York City Community Schools. In a time where our city faces complex challenges regarding public safety, mental health and academic recovery, I can attest through my professional experiences that Community Schools offer a proven, cost-effective infrastructure that stabilizes neighborhoods and ensures students are nurtured and ready to learn.

While the model often is viewed through an educational lens, Community Schools go beyond the walls of education, and have impacts in areas of wellness, engagement, and safety. By transforming school buildings into full-service day hubs, Community Schools address the root causes of many of NYC community instabilities:

- **Violence Interruption through Engagement** via an intentionally funded afterschool program;
- **Restorative Justice over Policing:** specialized coordinators managing conflict and prioritizing de-escalation and SEL over outdated punitive methods that have exacerbated the "School-to-Prison Pipeline";

- **Building a Safety Canopy:** when schools provide a food pantry, legal clinics, and mental health services, it reduces “crimes of survival” that often plagues high poverty neighborhoods.

Investing in the Community School model is a fiscal responsibility, as the model is geared towards preventative practices, as opposed to reactive. The cost of providing a “Whole Child” education is a fraction of the cost of reactive city services that currently exist. Additionally, Community Schools have demonstrated a superior ability to reduce chronic absenteeism, thus providing a higher promise of student achievement and paving the way for some of our City’s future leaders.

We cannot continue to expect our school-based teachers to wear the hats of social workers, nurses, crisis negotiators while delivering the world-class instruction we promise to the families of our neighborhoods. The Community School model has a proven infrastructure to handle the “outside the classroom” burdens so that high level learning can occur inside the classroom.

I respectfully request that the Committee:

1. **Increase baseline funding** for all existing NYC Community Schools,
2. **Expand the model** so that high need schools/communities can be supported with intentional services, resources, etc.

Thank you for your time and dedication to ensuring our students and families receive the quality education we promise to deliver.

Empire State
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILD CARE

Testimony of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair

March 23, 2026

Prepared by Shoshana Hershkowitz, Campaign Manager, Empire State Campaign for Child Care, and Dede Hill, Vice President of Policy, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz, and members of the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to testify.

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC) is a statewide coalition of parents, educators, and advocates who believe that every family in New York State deserves high quality, universal child care, and that every child care educator deserves to earn a thriving wage. The campaign was founded in 2017 and advocates at the state and federal level for investment in child care that best serves the needs of New York's families and child care educators. Many of the organizational and individual leaders and members of our campaign are New York City residents.

In November 2025, the ESCCC released a comprehensive plan for achieving our goal of statewide universal child care, including rollout principals to achieving that goal in a manner that prioritizes the lowest income New York families, and avoids unintended consequences, like destabilizing the home-based child care sector or reducing the number of infant and toddler seats. A December 2025 sign-on letter to Governor Hochul—from more than 140 organizations representing New York parents, child care providers, child and family advocates, and business leaders from every corner of the state—indicates the widespread support for this vision in New York City and around the state.

We were thrilled to stand with New York Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani in early January —on the Mayor's eighth day in office—when Governor Hochul proposed the state's single largest investment in child care and pre-K in state history, and framed these investments as steps toward achieving statewide universal child care. This is a defining, consequential moment for New York State child care. If City, State, local and community leaders work together to invest boldly, and choose the rollout path thoughtfully, we could truly transform child care— and the lives of families in New York—for generations. We urge you to act directly at the city level—and indirectly by calling for action at the state level—to ensure the rollout to universal child care is equitable, prioritizes low-income and marginalized communities, and increases compensation and supports for the early childhood education workforce beginning this year.

As you negotiate the New York City Budget, work with the Mayor to develop an implementation plan for expanding 3-K and implementing 2-K, and continue to monitor—and we hope, weigh in on—New York State budget negotiations, we urge you to consider the following recommendations.

Top Urgent Universal Child Care Recommendations for the New York City Council for 2026

- **New York City leaders should join the child care community and state lawmakers calling for the 2026-2027 New York State Budget to implement a child care workforce compensation fund to provide ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage ($1.2 billion).** Neither New York State nor New York City can achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field, which is not possible without a significant, sustained, compensation hike.
- **New York City leaders should urge New York State leaders to adopt the Governor's proposed $1.2 billion in new investment in the Child Care Assistance program and add the funding necessary to meet demand for CCAP /vouchers in New York City as the City and State move toward statewide universal child care.**
    - New York City leaders must ensure that New York City meets any matching requirements to draw down all CCAP funds.
    - New York City must act without delay to ensure that no early childhood seats are left empty while children from low-income families are languishing on the voucher waitlist.
    - ***If CCAP/voucher enrollment closures and waitlists are allowed to persist, the success of New York State and New York City's plans to expand pre-K, 3-K and 2-K will be undermined—and could result in the exclusion of low-income families. Pre-K expansions alone will not ensure low-income parents can work and achieve economic stability because without CCAP, many families will be unable to afford child care for younger children and/or for before and afterschool care for their pre-K, 3-K, 2-K and school-aged children. As the state expands universal child care, the CCAP program can be scaled down.***
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest $73 million to launch 2-K in New York City focusing initially on high-need areas, and ensure that 2-K is implemented in a manner that guards against the loss of (already scarce) infant and toddler seats, with flexibility to adjust the model to a multi-age, community care or other model if these issues arise. Further, it is essential that all modalities of child care—including center and home-based child care providers—are able to fully participate in 2-K.

How New York State and New York City Implements Universal Child Care Matters: Background

Low-income families must be prioritized, along with the workforce—which is among the lowest paid occupations in the state. Further, the rollout must be structured to avoid unintended consequences like increased tuition for middle-income families, a loss of already scarce infant and toddler capacity, or the destabilization of community-based and family child care programs by pulling older children, who cost less to care for, into school-based settings.

An Equitable Rollout of Universal Child Care and Pre-K and 3-K Expansion Must Include the Following Investment and Actions:

- **Immediate and sustained increase in workforce compensation through a state-funded workforce compensation fund.** For so long as child care remains a public-private market, with most families paying tuition on their own, the only way to raise the wages of the child care workforce without raising private-pay tuition is by paying state-funded workforce supplements until the state has made the transition to a truly universal system, paying rates that support a thriving workforce wage. Compensation supplements will also guard against an exodus of child care educators from community-based organizations to school based pre-K programs, which has been the case in other periods of pre-K expansion.

  The 2026-2027 New York State Executive Budget allocates **no funds** for the child care workforce. If no funding is added before the budget is finalized, this will be the second year in a row since the pandemic that there are no funds for the child care workforce. In 2023, one-time retention bonuses were awarded to child care educators: $3,000 full time; $2,300 afterschool. In 2024, bonuses of $2,250 for full time educators; $1,725 for afterschool.

- **Fully meet demand for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) as we build toward universal child care.** CCAP (also referred to as vouchers) currently helps the families of approximately 168,000 low-income children around New York State afford child care, with about 110,000 of those children residing in New York City. For those families able to access CCAP, this assistance can be life changing. They can see their annual child care bill for one infant in home-based child care drop from $16,000 to $500. Unfortunately, notwithstanding a surge in state funding into the CCAP program in recent years, demand still far outpaces funding. To manage this shortfall, as of January 2026, 34 counties and NYC have closed enrollment or started waitlists, leaving thousands of eligible families across the state scrambling to patch together care for their children, with some having to reduce their work hours, or leave the workforce altogether. In New York City, the CCAP/voucher waitlist currently includes more than 16,000 children. Notably, more than 20,000 pre-K and extended day, extended year pre-K seats went unfilled in fiscal year 2025. The State Executive Budget proposes $1.2B in new, recurring funding for CCAP—the largest increase to CCAP in New York State history. Unfortunately, even this historic level of investment is unlikely to permanently end waitlists and closures—particularly in New York City given the size of the waitlist. It is not clear yet what percentage of these new funds would be directed to New York City, but currently, New York City receives about 61% of the state's annual CCAP allocations. Of note: the Executive Budget proposes that $475 million of the new CCAP funding be earmarked for New York City contingent upon New York City matching those funds. The Administration for Children's Services estimates the funding need for New York City CCAP to be $1.2 billion, but that would only keep the voucher caseload at close to its current level; the waitlist would persist.

- **Also of concern: the voucher waitlist is playing a role in keeping compensation for child care educators low, particularly those working in home-based settings.** A November 2025 report by the New School's Center for New York City Affairs, *Dignified Pay for Quality Care*, demonstrates the extent to which under-enrollment in New York City home-based programs contributes to low-pay. The found that home-based provider average hourly wages in 2023 were $7.33 for Family Child Care and $5.98 per hour for Group Family Child Care, their hourly wage increased threefold if they had full, or close to full enrollment, to $18.84 and $17.62, respectively. However, only 29 percent of the FCC providers and 51 percent of GFCC providers surveyed had "good enrollment" in 2023. Across the state, licensed home-based providers serve 38% of families receiving CCAP/vouchers, leaving this modality of care particularly vulnerable to the impacts of low-enrollment because families are languishing on a CCAP/voucher waitlist.

- **Expand pre-K and 3-K in coordination with full funding of CCAP.**
- **Prioritize communities with high rates of low-income families with young children** for universal projects and pre-K expansions.

Other Core Principles

- **Middle-income families must be protected from rate hikes, benefits cliffs, and shifting supply as we scale up to universal child care**. Creating a state-funded child care workforce compensation fund allows for workforce wages to be increased without raising tuition for middle class families not yet able to access universal care. A capped-fee universal program for middle income families that is targeted to serve families just over the CCAP eligibility limit would be an approach that would address one of the sharpest benefits cliffs facing families who make just over the CCAP income limit.
- **Universal child care must be understood to include afterschool care, summer care, and evening and weekend care for children 0 to 13, and be inclusive of children with disabilities, and regardless of immigration status.** Families' need for child care extends beyond weekdays 9 to 5 (or 9-3 in the case of many pre-K programs), and long after a child enters pre-K or Kindergarten.
- **Infant and toddler seats must be preserved in pre-K and universal child care rollouts.** Rates to care for babies and toddlers are the highest because caring for very young children (appropriately) requires the most hands-on attention; as a result, these are already the hardest seats to find. Any rollout plan must be sure not to incentivize programs to switch scarce infant and toddler seats to care for older children.
- **All settings must be supported in pre-K and universal child care expansions** to ensure families have the freedom to choose the care setting that best meets their needs—home, center, and school-based.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached at shershkowitz@empirestatechildcare.org and dhill@scaany.org.

SASKIA TRAILL
PRESIDENT & CEO EXPANDED SCHOOLS
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE & THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
FISCAL YEAR 2027 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING: MARCH 23, 2026

My name is Saskia Traill, and I am the President/CEO of ExpandED Schools. Thank you to Speaker Menin, Chair Dinowitz, Chair Lee, the Committee on Finance, and the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify here today. It's a pleasure to work collaboratively with you all to create effective strategies that bolster the effectiveness of our educational infrastructure across the City, in an equitable and culturally responsive way.

I would like to begin by thanking the Council and this committee for baselining the $4M annual investment in High-Impact Tutoring (HIT) during last year's budget process. This investment scored a significant win for students across New York City, allowing them access to valuable, research-based instructional support.

Research consistently shows that high-impact tutoring, defined as tutoring provided in small groups (ratios of 1:4 or less), at least three times per week, by consistent, trained tutors, is one of the most effective interventions for improving educational achievement. At ExpandED Schools, we have seen the power of this model firsthand. Serving as the backbone organization for the New York City High-Impact Tutoring initiative, we have collaborated with 123 schools across 12 community school districts to ensure that math and literacy tutoring was provided to over 13,500 students from 2022-25 and project to reach an additional 6,500 students in the 2025-26 school year.

The results of the first three years of implementation have been strong. To date:

- **11,353 students across 106 schools in 12 community school districts have received tutoring from 2022-2025, with 99% of students identifying as students of color**
- New York City Students receiving math tutoring demonstrated exceptional progress, with more than half the students **made over 1.5 years of growth in 2024-25.**
- The number of New York City students participating in ELA tutoring in 2024-25 that were at or above benchmark **increased by 12 percentage points**, according to Acadience.
- **43% of participating students** made twice the progress they were expected to achieve by year's end.

With baselined funds, ExpandED is able to work with schools earlier this spring to ready them for tutoring next school year. We are grateful to the Council for its support.

Beyond High Impact Tutoring, ExpandED Schools is committed to strengthening literacy for young people. Given our expertise, we are particularly interested in ways that out-of-school-time can support educational goals. We support literacy enrichment throughout K-8 grades and have two requests of the City Council.

First is support for two models of literacy, Lit C.R.E.W for middle grades and LitPlay for elementary students. Lit C.R.E.W. is a literacy initiative designed to help middle school students move towards deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and research skills through project-based learning in afterschool and expanded learning environments. Through professional development, curriculum resources, and ongoing coaching, we equip educators to intentionally embed reading, discussion, and writing into

enrichment programming, thus making literacy part of how students explore ideas, collaborate with peers, and connect learning to real-world topics. LitPlay offers play-based activities for elementary grades to complement school-day work.

The results reflect both student growth and strengthened educator capacity. In FY 26, a citywide discretionary award from the City Council enabled ExpandED to partner with 14 community-based organizations across 16 Council Districts. Across Lit C.R.E.W and Lit Play combined, 93% of the students we serve identify as young people of color, and 84% live in underserved communities, affirming that this work is reaching those with the greatest need.

During the 2023–24 school year, **87% of literacy educators in the program reported** that **students were either engaged or very engaged** in the literacy program, and **65% noted** specific **literacy improvements** in their students. **Principals** also **expressed strong satisfaction** with the program and requested its continuation, which is a meaningful indicator of the trust and value schools place in this work. Beyond direct student impact, these programs are built to last, building lasting capacity within communities, equipping educators with the tools, training, and ongoing support needed to sustain literacy-rich environments long after any single program year ends.

To continue expanding this work and reach more schools and community-based organizations across the city, **we respectfully request $2 million in City Council discretionary funding to support the growth and sustainability of our literacy enrichment efforts. These funds will allow us to deepen literacy programming, train additional educators, and ensure that more young people across New York City have access to high-quality literacy experiences that support their academic success.**

Improving literacy in out-of-school-time programs is just one aspect of the solution. To achieve true and lasting literacy gains, we need a community-wide approach that engages children and families not only in afterschool programs but also in the neighborhoods, homes, and institutions that influence their daily lives. This is exactly the mission of the New York City Reads Neighborhood Initiative.

In FY24, ExpandED Schools assumed the role of facilitator for the initiative, ensuring continued progress and coordination among this collaborative effort. Each partner organization provides its own early literacy programming while simultaneously sharing resources and collaborating to make sure that no child falls behind.

The goal of the initiative is clear: to ensure that every child learns to read, meets grade-level performance by 5th grade, and is supported by a network that values and prioritizes literacy at home, in school, and throughout the community. This collaborative approach results in a greater impact than any single organization could achieve alone. The Initiative offers year-round, research-based literacy programming directly to families, both at home and in the community.

Across all three communities, the NYC Reads Initiative delivered meaningful results in School Year 2024–25, reaching children, families, and educators through a coordinated network of year-round programming.

In East Harlem, eight partner organizations provided research-backed literacy instruction to **440 children from pre-K through 4th grade across four schools**. At 10 local clinics, **28,157 free, bilingual, age-appropriate books** were distributed to families during well-child visits, and an estimated 17,000 children were reached across **35,302 visits, during which medical providers** guided families on brain development and the importance of early reading. **One hundred eight families received 1,842 personalized home visits** — both virtual and in-person — supporting early literacy and language development, with books and educational materials provided at each visit. To build community capacity,

391 educators, tutors, and volunteers participated in 84 training sessions, and 67 medical providers were trained to help families develop reading habits and understand the connection between literacy and child development.

In East New York, seven partner organizations served **313 students from pre-K through 4th grade across two schools**. Libraries played a central role, with 5,005 children and 3,073 families participating in programs including bilingual storytime, puppet shows, music, author visits, and homework help. **At four local clinics, 7,168 free bilingual books were distributed**, and an estimated 5,400 children were reached during 10,981 well-child visits. **Three hundred ninety-six parents attended 58 multilingual workshops** on topics ranging from phonics and vocabulary-building to kindergarten readiness and home reading routines. 180 educators, tutors, and volunteers strengthened their practice through 53 professional development sessions.

In South Jamaica, seven partner organizations reached **498 students from pre-K through 4th grade across three schools.** Beyond classroom instruction, **3,040 children and 1,003 families participated in 98 literacy activities** across schools, early learning centers, community-based organizations, and neighborhood parks. **Three hundred forty-eight parents attended 56 multilingual workshops** on early language development, phonics, vocabulary, and home reading routines. Families received 8,681 free, culturally relevant books along with 2,282 additional educational materials, including toys, early literacy kits, activity guides, and tablets. Three hundred thirty-three educators, tutors, and volunteers participated in 64 training sessions to deepen their capacity to deliver high-quality literacy programming.

To further expand our efforts and reach more students and community-based organizations throughout the city, **we respectfully request $300,000 in City Council discretionary funding to support the growth and sustainability of New York City Reads.** These funds will ensure that families continue to have access to local, high-quality literacy resources that are age-appropriate and culturally relevant. They will also provide children with ongoing opportunities to strengthen their reading skills. Sustaining this investment means upholding a proven model that meets families where they are and fosters the conditions necessary for children to succeed.

Lastly, we are proud members of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding. We call on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July – Learning to Work ($31M); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12M); infant/toddler child care seats ($10M); restorative justice ($6M); the Mental Health Continuum ($5M); early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M), as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Thank you again to Speaker Menin, Chair Lee, Chair Stevens, and the rest of your respective committees for holding this hearing and for all the work that you do for children and families across the City. I look forward to continuing to be a partner in services to young people and the community, particularly in extended learning time enrichment programming and in cultivating the safe, validating spaces they deserve.

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, Committee, and Council Members, my name is Germayoni Lopez, and I'm currently a high school senior attending The Beacon School. For the past two school years, I have been a student researcher with the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative.

As a student researcher, I have worked alongside TC students, educators, and fellow NYC public school students to develop a culturally responsive curriculum that bridges the gap between students and education. I have facilitated online and in-person town halls and served as a panel speaker at the Hispanic Education Summit 2025 and our Talleres event, where our educators and students presented projects curated during their time as Latinidad researchers.And where I was able to work directly with numerous educators who were equally driven to share the latino culture amongst their students, but lacked the resources and support to do so – our work together felt invaluable and make up the fabric of the lessons in the curriculum today. I have watched intergenerational groups of New Yorkers come together for the Latinidad curriculum initiative to support the need for a curriculum that acknowledges the culture, history, and art of the 40% of New York City's Latino public student population and beyond.

As a student, I have seen with my own eyes the importance of highlighting one's culture in the education system. Growing up as a Mexican American student in the South Bronx, I had never once questioned my culture, identity, and place in school until I went to high school. 40 minutes away from my family, friends, and safety net lies a school that I thought was a guarantee to accomplish what my family couldn't. Yet, throughout my 4 years in high school, I have realized the need for an education that both acknowledges my Chicano history while simultaneously being a rigorous curriculum. Despite New York City having some of the best public schools, I have not been able to ignore the disparities plaguing our schools – namely, prioritizing test scores over student integration and cultural acceptance. In my junior year, I grew tired of the segregation in our school system and decided to join the Latinidad team after realizing this work was rooted in a shared desire to feel represented in the curriculum and to push for change that the Latinidad curriculum has helped create.

Today, I stand before you all hoping that you all are just as driven to challenge the disparities within our education system through supporting and funding the Latinidad curriculum initiative. I believe that education isn't only about test scores and data, but rather the social culture reflected in a school. Students care about their education when they believe their education cares about them, and that is why LCI is important work to support.

Testimony from Eman Gad, Policy & Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) before the New York City Council Committee on Education
March 23, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Committee. My name is Eman Gad, and I am the Policy & Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). GGE is a Black feminist, intergenerational Brooklyn-based organization, reshaping culture and policy through advocacy, youth-centered programming, and narrative shift.

As a small, Black, queer and immigrant-led nonprofit doing critical racial, gender and sexuality justice and liberation work in the context of today's hostile world, the funding we receive is imperative to the development and growth of Black girls and gender-expansive youth of color across NYC. Therefore, we sit before you today to request continued support from City Council for our FY27 youth programming, so that GGE may continue to address the educational needs of young people across the city, and urge you to support the Dignity in Schools Campaign's call for a FY2027 budget that fully invests in the public school resources and restorative practices that will protect our most vulnerable communities.

We are facing democratic erosion nationally and the normalization of sexual violence against girls and gender-expansive youth. The lack of accountability for perpetrators in the Epstein files paired with the continual presence of ICE in our communities is impacting the mental health of youth that attend our programs. Young people feel powerless, which our staff has to respond to in real-time by shifting program curricula, increasing 1:1's, updating safety protocols, and developing a whole new organizing arm and campaign to tend to current, real-world needs and re-empower our young people.

Furthermore, attacks against "DEI" and racial justice work have led foundations to steer away from funding our work. This year, GGE is facing decreased funding from across the sector, with funders reducing investment away from gender and racial justice organizations. In response to these challenges, GGE has restructured by reducing staff and scaling back certain programs. This current FY, we are projecting a budget deficit of approximately $1M, which underscores the urgency of securing multi-year, flexible funding and a stronger partnership with City Council to stabilize operations and sustain impact not just for GGE, but for **ALL** small organizations doing this critical work.

This is why we have formally launched the Alliance on Gender Equity, or AGE, and are requesting $300,000 in the form of a new City Council initiative to sustain this work. AGE is a youth-led space for political education, civic engagement, leadership development and community-building for Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth of color. The coalition consists of our GGE youth participants, adult co-conspirators and non-profit allies. We convene with partner organizations on a monthly basis to see how we can support and uplift each other with our unique and shared priorities as we face growing attacks against our work and our communities.

To help build the youth alliance, we held a Town Hall In November 2025 centering young BIPOC girls, gender-expansive and LGBTQIA+ youth from all five boroughs. We heard from them in six priority areas, with many issues coming up that are of direct interest to this Committee, specifically discrimination in school policies. AGE turned these grievances and recommendations into a List of Demands for New York City and State, which is now the School G*rls Demand campaign, launched this month. We will share our demands and list of city-specific requests in the written submission, to keep this brief.

GGE is continuing to do the work and expanding our reach, despite financial constraints. With $300k in support from City Council through the AGE initiative, we hope to continue equipping young Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth to fight for a NYC that is resilient against harmful national forces working against them.

1. $350,000 towards our Young Women's Advisory Council program funded by Young Women's Leadership Development Initiative (YWLD) for political education and empowerment,
2. $200,000 towards our Sisters in Strength survivor program funded by the Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative (DoVE) initiative to support young survivors,
3. $100,000 towards the Sports Training and Role Models for Success (STARS) Initiative to promote the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of youth ages 12-24, and
4. $250,000 in ATI funding to continue our youth organizing work surrounding racial disparities in disciplinary actions and school policies, and promotion of restorative and healing justice measures and Alternatives to Incarceration.

We hope you consider supporting us in these endeavors. Thank you.

Send to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Submitted by
Jhonny Moya

March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor Preliminary Budget as it relates to the New York City Public Schools.

My name is Jhonny Moya, and I am proud graduate from the Stevenson Young Adult Borough Center (YABC) located in the Bronx which is a Learning to Work program that partners with Good Shepherd Services.

Before I joined Learning to Work, I was not sure about my future. Like many students, I needed guidance, real opportunities, and people who believed in me. This program gave me all of that.

Through Learning to Work, I was able to save money and gain real work experience. I improved my resume, but most importantly, I gained confidence in myself.

This program also gave me new opportunities. I met professionals, including my district Assembly Member, Karines Reyes, and made important connections. These experiences showed me that my voice matters and that I belong in professional spaces.

The biggest difference for me was the support. The staff helped me, guided me, and pushed me to do better. I learned important skills like communication, responsibility, and how to act in a professional environment.

Learning to Work also helped me explore different paths and get involved in my community. It showed me that I can make a difference, not only for myself, but for others too. That is why I am here today—to support students who want to join Learning to Work.

Programs like Learning to Work are very important. They help students grow, prepare for the future, and get opportunities they might not have.

I am here today because someone believed in me. I ask you to continue supporting programs like Learning to Work so more students can have the same chance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

TESTIMONY

The New York City Council

Committee on Education

Re: Preliminary Budget

Grand St. Settlement
80 Pitt Street
New York, New York

March 23, 2025

Testimony of Grand St. Settlement
To the New York City Council Committee on Education
Regarding The Preliminary Budget

March 23, 2025
Aaron M. Sanders, Deputy Director of Government & Community Relations

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education, for convening this important preliminary hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Grand St. Settlement (Grand Street) is a 110-year-old multi-service Settlement House. We serve over 18,000 New Yorkers through vital early childhood, youth, and older adult programs with impactful benefits assistance in the Lower East Side, Manhattan, and recently the Bronx.

We are also a member of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), a policy and social change organization, representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. As a member organization, we work collaboratively to support early childhood education. Additionally, we are a member of the Day Care Council of New York, a membership organization dedicated to the expansion of quality child care and family services.

Today, we are asking the New York City Council and the Mamdani administration to strengthen and preserve early education programs. We're pleased by the city's proactive commitments to the sector, specifically the Mayor's investment and expansion in 2K and 3K. Grand Street is advocating for the following investments:

- Implement **2-Care and 3-K funding** from New York State promptly, ensuring that rates are sustainable for home-based and center-based providers;
- Restore **$5 million** for outreach funding to ensure that families have support to find the right care that meets their needs;
- Restore **$10 million** for free, non-means-tested child care seats for 0-2 year olds, building on a pilot started in January 2026; and

- Restore and baseline Promise NYC at **$50 million** at ACS to provide services to children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidized child care.

City funding supports our network of center-based early education programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Grand Street early childhood education programs serve working families and their children, many of whom live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles to education, health, and economic prosperity. Our network of child care and educational programs provides families with the opportunity that supports their child's short-term and long-term development. Additionally, City funding supports Community Schools that serve youth and families with a continuum of early education and resources for families, including education, workforce development and mental health services. . At these institutions, we provide mental health, medical, and a continuum of services available to students who need them.

Despite recent progress, child care affordability remains an issue for many working families. Research indicates that early education is a key social determinant of health that impacts children's futures. Early child education takes a holistic approach to development– cognitively, academically, and socio-emotionally. These programs prepare children for the next stage of life. To make significant progress towards the creation of high-quality, equitable, affordable child care, we urge the Mamdani administration and City Council to commit to reversing cuts and making additional investments in the sector. All families should have access to high-quality child care options. Baseline funding for the City's education programs would help disrupt systemic inequities that impact low-income working families.

Maintaining the status quo for the city's early childhood education programs would be catastrophic for working families. According to a report from the New York City Comptroller's Office, the childcare sector faces ongoing challenges, including a dearth of child care slots, retention in its workforce, and soaring child care costs. As cited in the report, from 2018 to 2023, New York's average annual child care prices were higher than every other state except for Massachusetts, rising nearly 18% from $12,422 per child to $14,621, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. These disruptions not only affect working families but also the business sector and commercial corridors: a lack of universal child care is projected to cost $384 million in revenue, according to the aforementioned report. Investments in the sector will also promote economic growth, as parents in the workforce can better balance family and work.

In closing, we urge the City Council and the Administration to commit to the aforementioned budget asks.

31 East 62nd Street, New York, NY, 10065
Website: www.greenbeetz.org
Email: office@greenbeetz.org

Testimony Submitted by

Noa Urbach, Director of Programming and Partnerships

Green Beetz

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education

March 23rd, 2026

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu, and staff: thank you for your service and for your continued support of food and nutrition education throughout New York City.

My name is Noa Urbach and I am the Director of Programming and Partnerships at Green Beetz. Green Beetz is a food and sustainability education non-profit that provides a free, ready-to-teach curriculum to public school educators. We currently teach in 17 schools across four NYC boroughs, reaching 2,500 students, engaging 800 parents and caretakers, and training 200 educators.

Green Beetz is a proud member of the **NYC Food Ed Coalition**, a diverse group of over 300 advocates and program leaders working to ensure all NYC students have access to quality food education and healthy school meals. We are thrilled to join the Coalition in endorsing the following **FY27 Policy Priorities**:

- **Renew Funding for the Food Ed Hub ($250,000):** The Food Ed Hub provides critical resources and collaboration opportunities for small non-profits like ours. Renewing this funding is essential to strengthen the network of providers and expand access to nutrition education for the city's most vulnerable communities.
- **Expand Access to Food Ed Grants:** With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed funding, many organizations now rely on Food Ed Grants to stay in schools. Currently, only 456 of the ~1,800 NYCPS have access to these grants; additional funding is vital to ensure our curriculum and similar programs reach more students each year.
- **Invest in School Food Service Workers:** Adequate staffing and livable wages are necessary to support the kitchen staff who feed our students daily. Stronger investment here allows organizations like Green Beetz to work more closely with kitchen staff on menu messaging, food waste reduction, and composting initiatives.

Our curriculum empowers students to take action—from letter-writing campaigns to reduce sugar in cereals to creating plays about sustainable farming. By prioritizing these

31 East 62nd Street, New York, NY, 10065
Website: www.greenbeetz.org
Email: office@greenbeetz.org

three investments, the Council will ensure that NYC students have the tools they need to lead healthier lives and build a more sustainable city.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Noa Urbach

noa@greenbeetz.org

includenyc 520 EIGHTH AVENUE, 25TH FLOOR , SUITE 2503 , NEW YORK, NY 10018
TEL (212) 677-4650 • WWW.INCLUDENYC.ORG

New York City Council Oversight Hearing, Education Committee
on FY27 Preliminary Budget
March 23, 2026

We would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Education for holding this important oversight hearing on the City's FY2027 Preliminary Budget. My name is Lori Podvesker, and I am the Director of Policy at INCLUDEnyc. For over 42years, INCLUDEnyc (formerly known as Resources for Children with Special Needs) has helped hundreds of thousands of NYC families navigate the complex special education service and support systems.

While we commend Mayor Mamdani's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget for baselining funding for preschool special education services and summer programming, and for proposing long-overdue additional funds for the 30,000+ students with disabilities attending District 75 programs. However, the City must also better prioritize dismantling the systemic barriers in place that continue to segregate far too many students with disabilities.

As a result, we call on the City and Council to:

- Baseline funding of $2 million annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 and continuing for three years, to support implementation of two local laws (225 & 244) passed in 2019, strengthening integration planning and initiatives.
- Allocate the $12M needed to maintain the City's Sensory, Exploration, Education, and Discovery (SEED) program for students with intensive sensory needs.
- Increase funding in the 2025- 2029 Capital Plan for school accessibility by $450M, bringing the total investment to $1.25B.
- Invest $2M to expand travel training to serve more students with disabilities.

Nearly 60,000 students receiving special education services spend the majority of their school days in segregated schools and classrooms, in specialized settings, rather than alongside their general education peers. While many attend traditional schools, a significant number are in restrictive, self-contained, or separate District 75 settings, particularly students with emotional disabilities, an intellectual disability, or autism. The persistent segregation of students with disabilities will continue without adequate resources and new citywide integration initiatives, despite the City's efforts up to now to advance inclusion.

The City's investment in travel training is one mechanism among many that supports the independence and agency of students with disabilities by promoting their ability to travel between home and school, internships, and, eventually, post-secondary education or employment. This is

also a required skill for them in life after high school. Additionally, allocating more funding for school accessibility could make an estimated 45% of New York City public schools fully accessible by 2030.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working together and partnering with you to improve equity and access for all young people with disabilities in New York City.

Sincerely,

Lori Podvesker
Director of Disability and Education Policy

New York City Council
Education Committee
FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair

March 23, 2026

Testimony of InsideSchools

Good evening and thank you Chair Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak on the City's FY2027 Preliminary Budget. My name is Natasha Quiroga and I am the Director of Education Policy and InsideSchools at The New School's Center for New York City Affairs. For twenty years, InsideSchools has served as New York City's most trusted resource for millions of families throughout their children's public school education by serving as the one-stop-shop where New York City families can better understand New York City public schools. InsideSchools provides families with resources and support to make informed decisions and advocate for their children's education. Since 2023, we have intensified our focus on supporting the City's most vulnerable families, including immigrant and multilingual families. We have provided direct assistance to over 1,500 immigrant families as they navigate early childhood education, K-12 enrollment, and essential educational resources.

Immigrant families face many challenges navigating an unfamiliar education system in languages they do not speak while also dealing with housing instability, fears of immigration enforcement, and economic uncertainty. Many of these families who speak languages beyond the 12 mandated languages struggle to access basic information about their children's schools. Critical information from MySchools to parent-teacher conferences is not translated into their language and parents often lack digital literacy to access these platforms. School staff do not have capacity for individualized support. Without targeted support, children miss enrollment deadlines, families don't access free programs like 3K and Pre-K that could transform their children's trajectories, students are inappropriately placed in special education or denied services they need, and language barriers prevent meaningful parent-school partnerships.

InsideSchools bridge these gaps through an integrated approach combining accessible digital resources with hands-on direct services. Recently, we hosted a West African Parents Night at a Manhattan high school where for the first time information was presented in Fulani and Wolof to over 60 students and 20 parents thanks to our program manager who speaks those languages. The impact was immediate and profound.

A Fulani-speaking mother from Guinea told our program manager that she had been attending school meetings for months without understanding what teachers were saying. She would nod politely but felt lost and embarrassed, worrying she wasn't supporting her daughter properly. When our program manager began presenting in Fulani, her entire posture changed. She asked detailed questions about graduation requirements and Regents prep sessions. Later, while breaking her fast for Ramadan, she shared that she now understands what her child is learning and finally feels like the school is "her place too." Another father explained this was his first time

going to any meeting at his children's school and he attended only because the presentation would be in Wolof.

These families were unaware about their language access rights. While some may receive documents in Fulani or Wolof, few can read those languages. With no one at their children's schools speaking their languages, they routinely miss critical information and deadlines. Parents told us they finally understood their children's graduation requirements and how to advocate for interpretation at parent-teacher conferences, information that should have been available from the beginning.

To support more families like these, we urge the City Council to prioritize funding to:

- Extend and baseline funding for immigrant family communications and outreach to help families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access;
- Issue expanded guidance on interactions with non-local law enforcement;
- Implement comprehensive training so that all school staff are prepared to respond to enforcement activity; and
- Invest $8 million to establish the role of English Language Learner Instructional Specialists to support high-quality instruction for ELL students.

Despite progress, language access remains inadequate for families speaking languages beyond the 12 mandated languages. All students, especially our most vulnerable, have a right to a quality education!

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July – Learning to Work ($31M); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12M); infant/toddler child care seats ($10M); restorative justice ($6M); the Mental Health Continuum ($5M); early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M), as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Submitted by:
Natasha Quiroga
Director of Education Policy & InsideSchools
Center for New York City Affairs
The New School

Contact: quirogan@newschool.edu

INTERNATIONALS NETWORK
Transforming education for multilingual learners

NYC Council

Committee on Education Hearing –

Oral Testimony

Monday, March 23rd, 2026

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz, and members of the Education Committee, for the opportunity to address the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. My name is Jon Harriman, and I am the Director of School Support for New York at the Internationals Network, and we are proud to work alongside other organizations in the Education Collaborative of NYIC.

First, I'd like to congratulate Council Member Dinowitz on becoming Chair of the Education Committee. Internationals Network has 17 schools across New York City and has supported 20 more schools together serving more than 20,000 students. One of our 17 schools is ELLIS, which today is celebrating the return of Dylan Contreras Lopez to the Kennedy Campus, where CM Dinowitz taught.

Internationals Network is an education nonprofit organization successfully supporting schools to provide immigrant and refugee students with high quality education. Our schools consistently graduate students at rates exceeding the city and state average for MLLs.

At this time, the students and families we serve are facing an incredibly challenging moment, including

1) Difficult and complex decisions simply navigating daily routines and formerly routine immigration appointments.
2) Concerns about ICE presence around school perimeters and on common paths to and from school.
3) Abrupt family separations due to detention and deportation.

Internationals students tell us of their contrasting joy of being at school with teachers and classmates with their fear of getting to and from school safely each day. More explicit guidance and training from NYCPS is needed in this area.

As a retired Internationals principal and speaking with other principals, I know these fears and concerns impact emotional well-being, attendance and ability to focus on classwork.

We are grateful for the NYCPS policy on nonlocal law enforcement and the work of Project Open Arms in disseminating that policy. And as a more than 20 year member of the Education Collaborative, we ask for:

1) an expansion of guidance on interactions with non-local law enforcement, including on school perimeters and traveling to and from school.

2) ongoing training of all adults within the schools and on campus on how best to respond to a range of situations impacting our students.

We urge the Mayor and the Council to ensure that NYCPS expands clear, actionable guidance and training for all of the adults working to make our schools safe and welcoming spaces for all students.

Internationals Network is a leading organization supporting immigrant students, and we urge the Mayor and the Council to ensure expanded protections for immigrant students and training, as well as additional funding that supports education for multilingual learners and migrant youth and our organizations. In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever that nonprofit organizations like ours are adequately funded and supported. Our work is crucial to ensuring that immigrant and refugee youth in New York City receive the quality education they deserve, which depends on your funding the Affinity Organization contract. Internationals Network is also requesting $50,000 through the NYC Council's Welcome NYC Initiative to support newly arrived immigrants as they navigate barriers to education.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of our public schools and our newest New Yorkers.

Written Testimony for Public Hearing on Mayor's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget – Education

As a proud partner of City's First Readers—New York City's only public, citywide early literacy initiative—Jumpstart is requesting your support to transform how we prepare our youngest learners for success. Our mission is to provide language, literacy, and social-emotional programming for preschool children from under-resourced communities citywide, ensuring every child enters kindergarten ready to thrive.

Jumpstart's New York City Early Literacy Programming's role as a CFR partner organization focuses on providing comprehensive early childhood education support across all five boroughs through volunteer-led classroom programming, family engagement initiatives, and community literacy events. Our programming includes direct service in preschool classrooms, Read for the Record celebrations, literacy kit distributions, and family academies.

The impact is measurable: Jumpstart's programming increases children's conversational engagement—65% of children participate in 40 or more conversational turns during Jumpstart sessions, compared to 25 turns without our intervention. We see 58% of children show increased vocalizations during our programming.

In New York City, 540,000 children under five face systemic barriers to educational success. Jumpstart's programs turn childcare access into genuine kindergarten readiness and long-term academic success.

The early years—from birth to age five—are some of the most critical in a child's development. This is when language, literacy, and social-emotional foundations are built. When we invest in children during this window, we set them up for long-term success in school and in life.

Through our work, we have seen firsthand how access to early literacy programs, family supports, and high-quality early learning opportunities can change the trajectory of a child's future. These programs don't just benefit children—they strengthen families and communities.

That's why we stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in urging the City Council to ensure continued support for essential education programs that are set to expire in June 2026. While we are pleased that the Mayor's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget extends funding for preschool special education services and summer

programming, we are deeply concerned about the critical programs left without baseline funding.

Specifically, we urge continued investment in:

- **Infant/toddler (0–2) childcare seats in high-need communities ($10M)**
- **Outreach on available early childhood education programs ($5M)**
- **Immigrant family communications and outreach ($4M)**

These investments directly align with Jumpstart's mission and CFR's citywide early literacy ecosystem. Without this funding, thousands of our city's most vulnerable families will lose access to the very services that level the educational playing field.

If we are serious about closing achievement gaps, we must start early. We cannot wait until students are already struggling. We need to meet them—and their families—where they are, from the very beginning.

We understand that the Council's regulatory authority is limited. However, the Council plays a critical role in oversight and can compel transparency and reporting that helps ensure these programs are reaching the communities that need them most and delivering meaningful impact.

Our youngest learners cannot advocate for themselves, so it is our responsibility to speak up for them. Together, we can ensure that every New York City child—regardless of zip code, language spoken at home, or family income—starts school confident, supported, and ready to learn.

Our message is clear: invest early, invest equitably, and invest consistently in the future of our children. We urge Mayor Mamdani to baseline funding for these critical early childhood programs in the FY 27 Executive Budget so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can use these programs without the threat that they will be taken away.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to New York City's youngest learners.

Jenny Maenpaa

Director of Development, Jumpstart New York

Partner Organization, City's First Readers

KAUFMAN MUSIC CENTER

March 23, 2026

Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair
New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

Dear Chair Dinowitz and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Tony Mazzocchi, and I serve as President & CEO of Kaufman Music Center—a multi-faceted cultural institution in Lincoln Square that is home to a community arts school, a celebrated concert hall, and—most pertinent to the Committee's work—a K–12 public school. Founded in 1952 and grounded in the belief that music education *is* education, the Center has grown to become one of the City's most vibrant cultural institutions and a vanguard of arts-integrated public education. Every year, we reach audiences of 50,000+ from across New York, including 6,000+ students of all ages.

At the heart of our work is Special Music School (SMS), the nation's only K–12 public school where music is part of every student's daily academic experience—on equal footing with math, science, and literacy. Founded in 1996 through a groundbreaking partnership between Kaufman Music Center and New York City Public Schools, SMS provides free, comprehensive music training—including private lessons, ensemble work, and performance opportunities—integrated into a rigorous academic program.

The results are clear: SMS students consistently achieve at the highest levels, with **academic outcomes that rival**—and often exceed—**those of the City's most competitive public, charter, and independent schools**. But, just as important are the capacities students develop along the way: creativity, discipline, collaboration, and the confidence to stand up and share their work in front of others. These are not ancillary benefits—they are central to how students learn and grow.

The data bears this out: a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* found that students highly engaged in music were academically more than one year ahead of their peers and a 2022 study confirmed these effects are especially pronounced in low-income schools. These findings prove what Kaufman Music Center has long known: when music is part of the daily curriculum, students don't just become better musicians—**they become stronger learners, more engaged classmates, and more confident contributors to their communities.**

This context is especially relevant at a moment when artificial intelligence is reshaping how we access information and solve problems; the skills that will matter most in this new landscape—creativity, adaptability, collaboration, and the ability to communicate ideas clearly and confidently—are deeply human ones. Music education develops these capacities every day through practice, ensemble work, and performance.

This year, we are working to expand this model across New York City. In the 2025–26 school year, we co-launched *SoTru* Music School at P.S. 149 in Harlem in partnership with New York City Public Schools—the first expansion of the SMS model in more than a decade. Developed in close collaboration with Chancellor Samuels, *SoTru* brings this arts-integrated approach to a new community of students and demonstrates that SMS's model is not only effective, but replicable.

The impact of this work extends beyond student outcomes; each year, SMS sustains more than 50 teaching artists—where most schools have just one or two. Therefore, as SMS's footprint grows, so too does our training ground for the next generation of public-school teachers. That's why, at Kaufman Music Center, we are working to scale programs like Special Music School to reach more New York City students and expand job opportunities for emerging professionals to work in public schools.

As a former New York City Public Schools teacher, I have seen firsthand both the challenges and the extraordinary potential within our system. Partnerships like this require sustained commitment—but they offer a clear path forward. By investing in models that integrate the arts into the core of education, we can improve academic outcomes, strengthen our workforce, and better prepare students for the demands of the future.

We thank you for your continued leadership and support, and we urge the Committee to continue investing in arts-integrated education—not as an enrichment, but as a core strategy for the future of New York City's schools and economy.

Sincerely,

Tony Mazzocchi
President & CEO

KINDERCARE LEARNING COMPANIES™

5005 MEADOWS RD, SUITE 200
LAKE OSWEGO, OR 97035

March 23, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Education
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 – Department of Education

Dear Chair Dinowitz and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this important hearing, and for your commitment to ensuring access to high-quality early care and education for our youngest learners. KinderCare proudly operates seven high-quality child care centers in New York, serving nearly 800 young children ages six weeks to 6 years old.

I wanted to start off by thanking the Department of Education and City Hall for their continued focus on increasing access to child care and early learning for all New York City families. The fiscal year 2027 budget's proposed investment of $1.1 billion for Universal Pre-K and $547 million for Early Childhood Education Investment will go a long way towards ensuring every family of young children has the support they need to go to school or work each day knowing their children are in a safe and healthy educational environment.

Universal Child Care

Currently, four KinderCare centers participate in New York City's 3K and UPK programs. The success of universal child care that meets the diverse needs of New York families depends on a mixed delivery system that fully includes private and community-based providers alongside school districts. New York City has long relied on a mixed delivery model to expand access quickly, reach diverse communities, leverage existing capacity, and ensure educators are paid fairly. KinderCare strongly urges that any early childhood education expansions and related aid streams explicitly preserve and strengthen the mixed delivery model. Intentionally or inadvertently excluding private and community-based providers would reduce available seats, disrupt existing childcare arrangements, increase the cost of care for younger children, and undermine parental choice—particularly for working families who rely on full-day, year-round care.

We applaud the quick action Mayor Mamdani took to open up the 2K and 3K Request for Information (RFI) in February. Because the last 3K and UPK request for proposal (RFP) process was not rolling and had not opened for approximately six years, many newer programs and those more recently interested in participating in these successful programs have been unable to do so. The demand for child care is dynamic, and our approach should mirror that. For the City to best position itself to provide the highest quality of care, the RFP should be open, and on a rolling basis, and allow for flexibility in reconfiguring slots.

Comprehensive Background Checks

KINDERCARE LEARNING COMPANIES™

5005 MEADOWS RD, SUITE 200
LAKE OSWEGO, OR 97035

In addition to these investments, KinderCare appreciates the Department's and City Hall's efforts to streamline and improve administrative processes, including processing times for early childhood educator background checks. Through both the Department of Education and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, background check delays have long plagued child care providers operating in New York City. While the City Council has worked to improve clearance processing timelines by ensuring the departments have the resources, policies, and guardrails in place to improve their systems and increase efficiencies, New York City still lags far behind the rest of the state, as well as much of the country in terms of processing times.

Background checks play a critical role in assuring parents that their children will be safely cared for, and importantly, a teacher cannot supervise a classroom until they receive a clearance (or renewal) from the Department. While we are in very strong support of thorough background checks, the length of time clearances are taking is undermining providers' ability to provide New York City's children with care and quality educational programming, and is significantly worsening the ongoing staffing crisis. In order to meet the city's commitment to expanding access to child care and Pre-K, we must ensure we are building a qualified workforce and have a consistent pipeline of educators to staff these programs.

The delays cause would-be educators to leave the sector, and result in classroom closures and shortening of programs' operational hours, which impacts working parents' ability to find and access care. KinderCare supports increased funding to both the Departments of Education and Health and Mental Hygiene to ensure adequate staff, technology, and processes are in place to allow for thorough, but efficient, processing of background checks so the City can continue to expand access to high-quality education and care.

New York City can and should be a leader in public pre-k and child care. KinderCare stands ready to work with the City Council and City Hall to ensure that New York City's early care and education system remains stable, inclusive, and responsive to families' needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Margot Gould
Director of State Government Relations, KinderCare
Margot.Gould@kindercare.com

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony Submitted By
Alison Garbarini, MS, RDN, CDN
Research Associate
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education
March 23rd, 2026

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, thank you for your time and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Alison Garbarini and I am a Research Associate at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy. We are a leader in food & nutrition education and school food research.

Since 2019, City Council has funded our Food Ed Hub - which promotes collaboration and resource-sharing in the food and nutrition education space. The Hub is home to our Food Ed Coalition - a group of over 300 food and nutrition advocates, program leaders, and school community members.

Today, we're thrilled to join our Coalition in endorsing the following policy initiatives.

1. First, we ask the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education.

NYC provides grants for schools to hire external food and nutrition education providers. Our Coalition brings these providers together for meetings and invites them to participate in workshops to learn **research-backed components** that can make their programming more likely to **inspire positive food choices in NYC students.**

Increasing funding for these programs is vital. Only 456 of ~ 1,800 NYC schools currently receive support. With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is more important than ever.

2. Secondly, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers.

Our research findings reveal that adequate staffing and liveable wages are needed to retain school food staff. This support will have positive downstream impacts - improving school meal quality, meal participation, food security and food and nutrition education.

3. Finally, we urge the council to renew funding for the Food Ed Hub.

In addition to supporting our Coalition, the Food Ed Hub uplifts food and nutrition education in many ways.

We host and support impactful events, such as conferences, community gatherings, and professional development opportunities. On June 1 this year, we'll co-host (with NYCPS) the Food & Nutrition Education summit at Teachers College. This will bring together food ed providers, teachers and administrators from the 456 schools that have Food Ed grants.

We also amplify the voices of food and nutrition education through our weekly digest, blog and social media audience of nearly 11,000 people. We operationalize our research and share policy recommendations, curricula and online tools that bring food and nutrition education to life in NYC classrooms.

With renewed funding, we will continue to build community and capacity - facilitating collective action and advancing health equity and nutrition security for all.

—

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alison Garbarini, MS, RDN, CDN
Research Associate
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

Email: ag4415@tc.columbia.edu

Food Ed Hub

Building a Healthier NYC:
Support and Improve Food & Nutrition Education and School Meals

Overview

Housed within the **Tisch Food Center (TFC)**, the **Food Ed Hub** acts as a formal structure to foster collaboration and coordination among Food & Nutrition Education providers; helping to align resources, increase efficiency, avoid duplication of effort, and identify best practices that can be brought to scale. **The Food Ed Hub** has been funded by New York City Council **since 2019**, after a successful campaign by our very own **Food Ed Coalition**.

The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members. We work together to support the most vulnerable communities in New York City, and to ensure that all NYC students have access to quality food & nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food.

FY27 Policy Priorities:

Renew Funding for the Food Ed Hub

Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food and nutrition education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (**$250,000**).

Expand Access to Food Ed

Increase funding for Food & Nutrition Ed (FNE) programming in NYCPS. FNE is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed funding, many FNE organizations will rely on Food Ed Grants to provide FNE in schools. Currently, only 456 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will help expand programming to more schools each year.

Invest in Food Service Workers

Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.

School meals are the most nutritious meals students get each day - and are essential for kids facing food insecurity. Early findings from 2 research studies at TFC revealed that understaffing of school kitchens is one of the biggest challenges facing School Food Service Directors and limiting school meal quality. Both Coalition partners and study participants noted that current kitchen employees and potential hires find more competitive wages and benefits elsewhere - in independent schools, fast-food companies, and other city agencies.

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

Program in Nutrition

Teachers College, Columbia University

Overview

The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy (Tisch Food Center) is housed within the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. We conduct innovative studies on food and nutrition education, and use our findings to develop evidence-based resources, including: curricula, recommendations for best practices, and other relevant tools. By engaging with schools, community members, and policymakers, we play a crucial role in empowering people to *not only* understand our current food system, but to advocate for a healthy, just, and sustainable food future.

Our Value

The Tisch Food Center is uniquely positioned to provide expertise in nutrition science and education. The Center has benefited from years of leadership by the Program in Nutrition, which established the field of nutrition education in 1909 and is a leader in training Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs). Our faculty and staff have decades of experience in developing health promotion strategies, researching school food, collaborating with government agencies and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), and leading advocacy campaigns.

Enhancing Nutrition Education

NYC provides grants which allow schools to hire external nutrition education providers (NEPs). Our Coalition brings NEPs together for regular meetings and invites them to participate in program evaluation workshops. We teach NEPs to incorporate specific **research-backed components,** which can make their programming more likely to **inspire positive food choices in NYCPS students.**

In addition, we **create resources for educators,** including curriculum and online tools. Our project CRUNCH Lunch shows teachers how to use Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to **encourage students to eat school lunch.**

Research & Evaluation

The Chefs in the Schools Program was a professional development and training program for school cooks, which was coordinated by the NYC Office of Food & Nutrition Services, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, and Wellness in the Schools. We are evaluating this program to understand the **impact of this government-supported initiative** and to learn **best practices for future implementation.**

We are also analyzing the impact of school meal policy changes in New York State. We interviewed and surveyed families and school food service directors, and assembled state-wide meal participation data to learn how free school meals **impact families and food service operations.** This will yield recommendations for how to best **support the Universal Free School Meals program in New York.**

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Our Impact

We amplify the voices, needs and impact of food and nutrition education through a weekly emailed digest, as well as our blog and social media – which reach a combined audience of nearly 11,000 people.

We uplift food and nutrition education work by hosting and supporting impactful events. Over the past 2 years we have hosted 2 conferences (with 400+ registrants each), 2 awards ceremonies, a community gathering (with 270+ registrants), and numerous opportunities for professional development. We also work with NYCPS to support, sponsor, and/or co-host their annual events, including their Food Education Partner Fair and their End-of-Year Showcases.

We operationalize our research findings into tangible recommendations for policy and practice. Our website provides public access to over 20 reports, briefs, and evaluations from our research, and we continue to add more as studies progress. Our blog explains our findings using Layman's terms and offers ideas, opportunities, and resources for putting them into practice.

We support NYC's most vulnerable populations by endorsing bills, submitting testimony, and leading campaigns to advocate for equitable, sustainable, healthy food and healthier school food environments.

Looking Ahead

- We will continue to build community and capacity - by convening advocates, program leaders, school community members, and other stakeholders in our Food Ed Coalition meetings.
- We will maintain and update our website's nutrition education resources, including the Wellness Program Finder, E-Learning database, and Curricula page.
- We plan to release an update of our 2018 report, "A is for Apple: The State of Nutrition Education Programs in NYCPS."
- We plan to collaborate with NYCPS on 1) a professional development series for DOE educators and 2) an evaluation of the impact of Food Education and Nutrition Collaborative grants on schools who are in their final year of grant funding, and how these schools plan to continue implementing this work in the future.
- Above all: *we will work to improve students' lives with food and nutrition education, and continue to inspire and invest in the next generation of food and nutrition leaders.*

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

Program in Nutrition

Teachers College, Columbia University

Overview

The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy (Tisch Food Center) is housed within the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. We conduct innovative studies on food and nutrition education, and use our findings to develop evidence-based resources, including: curricula, recommendations for best practices, and other relevant tools. By engaging with schools, community members, and policymakers, we play a crucial role in empowering people to *not only* understand our current food system, but to advocate for a healthy, just, and sustainable food future.

Our Value

The Tisch Food Center is uniquely positioned to provide expertise in nutrition science and education. The Center has benefited from years of leadership by the Program in Nutrition, which established the field of nutrition education in 1909 and is a leader in training Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs). Our faculty and staff have decades of experience in developing health promotion strategies, researching school food, collaborating with government agencies and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), and leading advocacy campaigns.

Enhancing Nutrition Education

NYC provides grants which allow schools to hire external nutrition education providers (NEPs). Our Coalition brings NEPs together for regular meetings and invites them to participate in program evaluation workshops. We teach NEPs to incorporate specific **research-backed components**, which can make their programming more likely to **inspire positive food choices in NYCPS students.**

In addition, we **create resources for educators**, including curriculum and online tools. Our project CRUNCH Lunch shows teachers how to use Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to **encourage students to eat school lunch.**

Research & Evaluation

The Chefs in the Schools Program was a professional development and training program for school cooks, which was coordinated by the NYC Office of Food & Nutrition Services, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, and Wellness in the Schools. We are evaluating this program to understand the **impact of this government-supported initiative** and to learn **best practices for future implementation.**

We are also analyzing the impact of school meal policy changes in New York State. We interviewed and surveyed families and school food service directors, and assembled state-wide meal participation data to learn how free school meals **impact families and food service operations.** This will yield recommendations for how to best **support the Universal Free School Meals program in New York.**

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Ravnika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

Program in Nutrition

Teachers College, Columbia University

Our Impact

We amplify the voices, needs and impact of food and nutrition education through a weekly emailed digest, as well as our blog and social media – which reach a combined audience of nearly 11,000 people.

We uplift food and nutrition education work by hosting and supporting impactful events. Over the past 2 years we have hosted 2 conferences (with 400+ registrants each), 2 awards ceremonies, a community gathering (with 270+ registrants), and numerous opportunities for professional development. We also work with NYCPS to support, sponsor, and/or co-host their annual events, including their Food Education Partner Fair and their End-of-Year Showcases.

We operationalize our research findings into tangible recommendations for policy and practice. Our website provides public access to over 20 reports, briefs, and evaluations from our research, and we continue to add more as studies progress. Our blog explains our findings using Layman's terms and offers ideas, opportunities, and resources for putting them into practice.

We support NYC's most vulnerable populations by endorsing bills, submitting testimony, and leading campaigns to advocate for equitable, sustainable, healthy food and healthier school food environments.

Looking Ahead

- We will continue to build community and capacity - by convening advocates, program leaders, school community members, and other stakeholders in our Food Ed Coalition meetings.
- We will maintain and update our website's nutrition education resources, including the Wellness Program Finder, E-Learning database, and Curricula page.
- We plan to release an update of our 2018 report, "A is for Apple: The State of Nutrition Education Programs in NYCPS."
- We plan to collaborate with NYCPS on 1) a professional development series for DOE educators and 2) an evaluation of the impact of Food Education and Nutrition Collaborative grants on schools who are in their final year of grant funding, and how these schools plan to continue implementing this work in the future.
- Above all: *we will work to improve students' lives with food and nutrition education, and continue to inspire and invest in the next generation of food and nutrition leaders.*

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony Submitted By
Pamela Koch, EdD, RDN, CDN
Mary Swartz Rose Associate Professor of Nutrition and Education
Faculty Director, Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education
March 23rd, 2026

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, thank you for your time, and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Pam Koch and I am the Faculty Director at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy or Tisch Food Center (for short) at Teachers College Columbia University. Since FY20, we have had generous support from the City Council for our Food Education Hub. We are incredibly grateful for this support of $250,000.

Take a moment to think about the last thing you ate. Some of you may have had a meal that nourished you, giving your body what it needs to be the best version of yourself and fully present in this moment. Some of you may be hungry. No matter how hard you try, thoughts about food cloud your mind and you just can't pay attention. Others may have had a quick snack, with lots of calories, but not many nutrients so it didn't sustain you, making you, too, feel foggy.

What we want is for ALL NYC Public School students from 2K through high school to be well nourished and the very best versions of themselves to be ready and excited to learn every school day.

Sounds simple? It's not. Many NYC families are stretched thin, with few resources for food and Federal programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are being cut, with the education part of SNAP, called SNAP-Ed, being eliminated. Many communities have limited access to fresh, whole nourishing food making it easier to get chips, sweetened ice tea, and candy bars than apples or carrots. We can only eat what is available so it is not surprising that nationwide, about ⅔ of the calories school-aged children eat are ultra-processed food. When students eat diets of ultra-processed foods they are getting not enough of the nutrients that they need and too much added sugar, sodium, food additives as well as increased exposure to microplastics.

That is why we need to focus on food and nutrition education. We also need to do all we can to make the very most of school meals. School meals is a Federal program that benefits our NYCPS students. We want to make the most of this program to get our students high quality meals in cafeterias that make eating enjoyable.

Each and every day students “learn” about food – implicitly or explicitly – in the cafeteria. Think of what messages students receive if the foods are prepackaged reheated foods, serving is rushed, and the cafeteria is chaotic. Contrast that to a cafeteria where the food is freshly prepared, served with a brief conversation and smile and the cafeteria is calm and pleasant.

As the academic leader in school-based food and nutrition education for over a century, Teachers College has been and still is a change maker. Let me tell you what NYC has accomplished the last few years. We hope this is just the beginning.

The 2022–23 school year launched the Chef’s Council to create recipes to showcase the cultures of NYC with fresh-cooked, plant-forward meals, and also launched a “Roadmap” for expanding food education.

The 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years put these into action. Some schools were awarded grants to provide food education, working with the many partners from our Food Education Coalition that gets students inspired through gardening, cooking and advocating for food equity and justice. There was also the Chefs in the Schools program where 70 Chefs worked with the Office of Food and Nutrition Services kitchen staff on preparing all those “chefs collaborative” recipes.

This school year those school meal improvements continue to grow and more schools are receiving food education grants. Also NYC Public schools Office of Food Education is creating “Food Education standards” that connect food across academic subjects. This will help expand access to food and nutrition education for our students.

The Food Ed Hub based at Teachers College is now needed more than ever. Here is what research evidence shows is the process for why food and nutrition education changes students eating behaviors:

- ***Students get clear messages that fresh, whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains are what nourish us*** (and enable us to be our best selves and fully present)

- ***Students are inspired to want to eat more of these nourishing foods – no because adults say so but because they want to do this for themselves.*** They also ***become inspired to eat less ultra-processed foods*** (such as chips, candy and sweetened beverages) again not because adults say so but because they realize that eating less of these foods will help them accomplish their personal goals.

- ***Students increase their agency and confidence that they can eat a nourishing diet*** and recognize that school meals provide this to them.

- ***Students gain skills in navigating through our complex food environment*** (including the food advertising targeted at children and youth) and ***want to become advocates for equitable access to nourishing foods for all (food justice).***

What do we need?

1) ***Continued support of the Food Education Hub at $250,000.*** This is an investment that will help us maintain our Food Education Coalition with all the partners working in school and to maintain our close relationship with the Food Education Office within the Office of Food and Nutrition Services.

2) ***Increased funding for Food Education grants and not stopping until we reach all NYC Public School students.*** These grants allow schools to work with partners who increase schools' capacity for school gardens (proven to get students excited to eat what they grow and have many other benefits for students), cooking (also proven that students will eat food they prepare themselves), nutrition education, and food justice.

3) ***Increased wages, capacity and recognition for our school food service workers who nourish our students.*** Just imagine schools where our food service workers were seen as integral to the school community and cherished for nourishing our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Pamela Koch, EdD, RDN
Mary Swartz Rose Associate Professor of Nutrition and Education and
Faculty Director Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

Email: pak14@tc.columbia.edu

Food Ed Hub

Building a Healthier NYC:
Support and Improve Food & Nutrition Education and School Meals

Overview

Housed within the **Tisch Food Center (TFC)**, the **Food Ed Hub** acts as a formal structure to foster collaboration and coordination among Food & Nutrition Education providers; helping to align resources, increase efficiency, avoid duplication of effort, and identify best practices that can be brought to scale. **The Food Ed Hub** has been funded by New York City Council **since 2019**, after a successful campaign by our very own **Food Ed Coalition**.

The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members. We work together to support the most vulnerable communities in New York City, and to ensure that all NYC students have access to quality food & nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food.

FY27 Policy Priorities:

Renew Funding for the Food Ed Hub

Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food and nutrition education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (**$250,000**).

Expand Access to Food Ed

Increase funding for Food & Nutrition Ed (FNE) programming in NYCPS. FNE is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed funding, many FNE organizations will rely on Food Ed Grants to provide FNE in schools. Currently, only 456 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will help expand programming to more schools each year.

Invest in Food Service Workers

Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.

School meals are the most nutritious meals students get each day - and are essential for kids facing food insecurity. Early findings from 2 research studies at TFC revealed that understaffing of school kitchens is one of the biggest challenges facing School Food Service Directors and limiting school meal quality. Both Coalition partners and study participants noted that current kitchen employees and potential hires find more competitive wages and benefits elsewhere - in independent schools, fast-food companies, and other city agencies.

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony Submitted By
Vama Naik
Graduate Student, Intern at Laurie M. Tisch Food Center
Teachers College, Columbia

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education
March 23rd, 2026

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service and continued support of Food and Nutrition Education initiatives across NYC.*

My name is Vama Naik and I am a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University in their Nutrition Education program, and also an intern at the Laurie M. Tisch Food Center.

Working at the Tisch Food Center in the policy and communications sphere has been one of the highlights of my nutrition schooling, as it has allowed me to see into the possibilities of my future career as a dietitian and nutrition education advocate.

I am thrilled to be here with the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives:

First, we implore the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYCPS.

Growing up, I never saw my South Asian culture represented in the cafeteria food I was served, the lesson plans I was taught, and the books I was assigned to read, and I also saw first-hand the quiet and unsettling grip that food insecurity had on my fellow students.

We have the opportunity to change this narrative through increasing funding for food education programs, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. This need is also heightened with the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, and increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is vital to ensure that this important work continues.

Second, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers.

Our initiatives to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will only be the most effective if we provide adequate staffing and livable wages that are needed to support school kitchen staff. A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce would help to evaluate

career pathways, titles, wages, kitchen staff to student ratios, and professional development opportunities.

Finally, we urge the council to strengthen Food and Nutrition Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub.

With this renewed funding, future interns and students like myself can continue to explore careers within policy, education, and communications, and build meaningful connections with the Food Ed hub's educators, community advocates, and non-profit directors, who are the heart of making positive change within NYC's food sphere.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vama Naik
Graduate Student in Nutrition Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Email: vnn2106@tc.columbia.edu

Food Ed Hub

Building a Healthier NYC:
Support and Improve Food & Nutrition Education and School Meals

Overview

Housed within the **Tisch Food Center (TFC)**, the **Food Ed Hub** acts as a formal structure to foster collaboration and coordination among Food & Nutrition Education providers; helping to align resources, increase efficiency, avoid duplication of effort, and identify best practices that can be brought to scale. **The Food Ed Hub** has been funded by New York City Council **since 2019**, after a successful campaign by our very own **Food Ed Coalition**.

The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members. We work together to support the most vulnerable communities in New York City, and to ensure that all NYC students have access to quality food & nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food.

FY27 Policy Priorities:

Renew Funding for the Food Ed Hub

Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food and nutrition education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (**$250,000**).

Expand Access to Food Ed

Increase funding for Food & Nutrition Ed (FNE) programming in NYCPS. FNE is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed funding, many FNE organizations will rely on Food Ed Grants to provide FNE in schools. Currently, only 456 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will help expand programming to more schools each year.

Invest in Food Service Workers

Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.

School meals are the most nutritious meals students get each day - and are essential for kids facing food insecurity. Early findings from 2 research studies at TFC revealed that understaffing of school kitchens is one of the biggest challenges facing School Food Service Directors and limiting school meal quality. Both Coalition partners and study participants noted that current kitchen employees and potential hires find more competitive wages and benefits elsewhere - in independent schools, fast-food companies, and other city agencies.

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

Program in Nutrition

Teachers College, Columbia University

Overview

The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy (Tisch Food Center) is housed within the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. We conduct innovative studies on food and nutrition education, and use our findings to develop evidence-based resources, including: curricula, recommendations for best practices, and other relevant tools. By engaging with schools, community members, and policymakers, we play a crucial role in empowering people to *not only* understand our current food system, but to advocate for a healthy, just, and sustainable food future.

Our Value

The Tisch Food Center is uniquely positioned to provide expertise in nutrition science and education. The Center has benefited from years of leadership by the Program in Nutrition, which established the field of nutrition education in 1909 and is a leader in training Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs). Our faculty and staff have decades of experience in developing health promotion strategies, researching school food, collaborating with government agencies and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), and leading advocacy campaigns.

Enhancing Nutrition Education

NYC provides grants which allow schools to hire external nutrition education providers (NEPs). Our Coalition brings NEPs together for regular meetings and invites them to participate in program evaluation workshops. We teach NEPs to incorporate specific **research-backed components,** which can make their programming more likely to **inspire positive food choices in NYCPS students.**

In addition, we **create resources for educators,** including curriculum and online tools. Our project CRUNCH Lunch shows teachers how to use Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to **encourage students to eat school lunch.**

Research & Evaluation

The Chefs in the Schools Program was a professional development and training program for school cooks, which was coordinated by the NYC Office of Food & Nutrition Services, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, and Wellness in the Schools. We are evaluating this program to understand the **impact of this government-supported initiative** and to learn **best practices for future implementation.**

We are also analyzing the impact of school meal policy changes in New York State. We interviewed and surveyed families and school food service directors, and assembled state-wide meal participation data to learn how free school meals **impact families and food service operations.** This will yield recommendations for how to best **support the Universal Free School Meals program in New York.**

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Program in Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

Our Impact

We amplify the voices, needs and impact of food and nutrition education through a weekly emailed digest, as well as our blog and social media – which reach a combined audience of nearly 11,000 people.

We uplift food and nutrition education work by hosting and supporting impactful events. Over the past 2 years we have hosted 2 conferences (with 400+ registrants each), 2 awards ceremonies, a community gathering (with 270+ registrants), and numerous opportunities for professional development. We also work with NYCPS to support, sponsor, and/or co-host their annual events, including their Food Education Partner Fair and their End-of-Year Showcases.

We operationalize our research findings into tangible recommendations for policy and practice. Our website provides public access to over 20 reports, briefs, and evaluations from our research, and we continue to add more as studies progress. Our blog explains our findings using Layman's terms and offers ideas, opportunities, and resources for putting them into practice.

We support NYC's most vulnerable populations by endorsing bills, submitting testimony, and leading campaigns to advocate for equitable, sustainable, healthy food and healthier school food environments.

Looking Ahead

- We will continue to build community and capacity - by convening advocates, program leaders, school community members, and other stakeholders in our Food Ed Coalition meetings.
- We will maintain and update our website's nutrition education resources, including the Wellness Program Finder, E-Learning database, and Curricula page.
- We plan to release an update of our 2018 report, "A is for Apple: The State of Nutrition Education Programs in NYCPS."
- We plan to collaborate with NYCPS on 1) a professional development series for DOE educators and 2) an evaluation of the impact of Food Education and Nutrition Collaborative grants on schools who are in their final year of grant funding, and how these schools plan to continue implementing this work in the future.
- Above all: *we will work to improve students' lives with food and nutrition education, and continue to inspire and invest in the next generation of food and nutrition leaders.*

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Pam Koch, 212-678-3001, pak14@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, ag4415@tc.columbia.edu
Raynika Trent, rt2569@tc.columbia.edu

March 23, 2026, Learning Care

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 – Department of Education

Learning Care is a national provider of high-quality early childhood education, with capacity to serve more than 165,000 children daily, ages six weeks to 12 years, across 40 states. Through our three New York City locations, we have the capacity to serve approximately 240 children in Brooklyn and Manhattan. We submit this testimony in support of the City's continued and expanded budget investments in child care and pre-kindergarten, and to urge the Council and the Administration to make critical improvements to the background check processing system administered through the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

New York City has made extraordinary progress in expanding early childhood access. The City's universal pre-k and 3-K for All programs represent landmark achievements—not only in scale, but in signal: they tell families, providers, and the country that New York City believes every child deserves a strong start, regardless of zip code or family income, while empowering parents to choose the best setting for their child. This preliminary budget proposal builds on that foundation with sustained, strategic investment as the City begins to include younger children in expanded settings.

Supporting Sustained Investment in Universal Child Care and Pre-K

The evidence base for high-quality early childhood education is overwhelming and unambiguous. Children who participate in quality early learning programs demonstrate stronger school readiness, improved literacy and math skills, better long-term health outcomes, and higher rates of economic self-sufficiency as adults. For families, access to affordable child care is not a luxury—it is an economic necessity. When parents, particularly mothers, cannot access reliable care, they leave the workforce, reduce their hours, or forgo career advancement. The ripple effects on household income, tax revenue, and the broader city economy are substantial.

New York City's investment in universal pre-k and 3-K for All has helped hundreds of thousands of families, and the demand is there to do more. This year, the Mayor and Department of Education opened the contracting process to help address longstanding unevenness in seat availability across neighborhoods. Maintaining an open and regular process for providers not currently participating will be critical to ensuring quality for the child, choice for the family, and an equitable distribution of seats within communities.

Building on this foundation by expanding to include younger age groups will help New Yorkers facing a child care market that is both prohibitively expensive and acutely under-supplied. Continuing to build on the initial investment in 2 Care over the coming

years will help to stabilize care for families already receiving child care subsidies, while also addressing the needs of families who fall into affordability gaps between state subsidy eligibility and market rates for child care.

The Critical Importance of a Mixed-Delivery System

Ensuring that New York City delivers on the promise of affordable child care and preschool for every family will hinge on the meaningful inclusion of providers of every type. A mixed-delivery system—one that includes community-based organizations, nonprofit providers, independent operators, and yes, national and regional providers with demonstrated quality track records—offers the City flexibility, geographic reach, and a diversity of program models that no single provider type could achieve alone.

We are encouraged by the City's stated commitment to affordability and to preserving and growing the mixed-delivery model. We ask the Council to ensure that this commitment is protected in the budget—specifically, that funding mechanisms and contracting structures remain open, fair, and accessible to qualified providers of all sizes and types. We also ask that the City continue to engage prospective providers in dialogue about barriers to entry, including application complexity, contracting timelines, and facility requirements that may inadvertently discourage high-quality operators from pursuing expansion into New York City.

The families of this city deserve choices. A strong, diverse, mixed-delivery system is how we deliver on that promise.

Need to Streamline Background Check Processing at DOHMH

Once again, we must raise the urgent operational issue of slow background clearance timelines for child care staff and urge the Council to support DOHMH with adequate funding for needed staff and hold the Department accountable for working toward nationwide norms in processing timelines.

Background checks are a non-negotiable component of child safety, and the rigor and integrity of this screening process must remain sound. However, the current processing timelines—even following recent improvements—remain far too long for providers to make sound, efficient staffing decisions that families can depend on.

When a prospective hire must wait weeks or months for a background check to clear before working unsupervised in a classroom, providers face an impossible set of limitations in how they can staff classrooms with qualified, cleared teachers, within ration requirements. As a result of these long delays, classrooms are held empty, qualified candidates leave the sector, and families face additional barriers to accessing the child care that they require. The consequence of New York City's pervasive and slow processing timeline is not merely inconvenience—it is the loss of the early childhood workforce we are all working so hard to build.

In recent years, with investment from the City Council, DOHMH has made progress in reducing processing times and we genuinely commend those efforts. But progress made is not the same as the problem solved. For staffing purposes, predictability, integrity, and speed matters. Providers need to be able to tell a candidate, with confidence, how long the process will take—and they need that timeline to be reliably short.

We respectfully urge the Council to allocate the necessary funding to expedite background checks to meet national norms of 7 to 10 business days and require DOHMH to report to the Council regular reporting on background check processing volume, timelines, and opportunities for continued improvement. Early childhood education programs can only be as good as their staff and streamlined background checks is essential.

Learning Care is proud to be part of New York City's early childhood community. We share this Council's vision of a city where every family—regardless of income, neighborhood, or circumstance—can access high-quality, affordable care for their youngest children. We believe that vision is achievable, and that this budget cycle is a critical moment to affirm it.

We ask the Council to protect and expand funding for universal pre-k and expanded child care access, to preserve the mixed-delivery system that makes broad access possible, and to drive meaningful improvements to the background check process that holds back the workforce we desperately need.

We are grateful for the Council's leadership on these issues and stand ready to serve as a partner in this work. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Council Members and staff to discuss these issues further at any time.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Gutman
SVP, Public Policy & Government Relations
Learning Care

ORAL TESTIMONY:

Thank you for the chance to testify on education priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. My name is Albania Jimenez; I am the Chief of Advocacy and Community Mobilization at Literacy in Community, or LINC as we are also known. LINC provides early literacy programs in all five boroughs, serving families with children from birth through age five. Our goals are empowering families to prepare their children for school and instilling a life-long love of learning.

Over the past 12 years, the city has increasingly implemented educational programs that move into this space, outside the traditional K-12 framework. First Universal Pre-K, then 3K and most recently 2K. At the same time, the importance of childcare has risen as a political and economic priority. What we need now is a citywide framework that recognizes early literacy not as an optional enhancement, but as the heart of a child development system.

Why?

Learning to read starts from birth. Over 80% of a child's brain is developed by age three; 90% by age five. And the research is clear: experiences in the earliest years shape cognitive growth, executive functioning, and long-term academic, social, and health outcomes. The foundations of language development and reading ability are built long before a child ever enters a classroom.

If we are serious about reaching the ambitious NYC Reads goal of universal reading proficiency by 2035, we must infuse early literacy into universal childcare settings and into every early childhood system such as our pediatric public health system. By creating an Early Childhood subcommittee, the Council has taken an important step toward creating comprehensive oversight of what is currently a very fragmented portfolio. We at LINC applaud this progress and are eager to support the development of an early education ecosystem. We look forward to engaging with you around this goal.

Albania Jimenez
Chief of Advocacy & Community Mobilization
ajimenez@lincnyc.org

Visit our programs! | www.lincnyc.org

5030 Broadway, Suite 641
New York, NY 10034
212-620-5462 ext. 115

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITTEN TESTIMONY

LITERACY in COMMUNITY (LINC)

Literacy in Community (LINC) was founded in 1996 to improve the literacy outcomes of children living in some of NYC's highest poverty neighborhoods. Since its founding, LINC has viewed literacy as a social justice issue and our programming as a tool to achieve educational justice, itself the foundation of social justice.

Operating at the intersection of education and community mobilization, LINC leverages the aspirations of parents and caregivers and taps into existing resources. Every community has people who want the best for children, who want to help children succeed. Every New York City neighborhood has resources–schools. libraries, CBOs–but they are seldom mobilized in concert and in pursuit of a particular goal. LINC programs help the community to address the obstacles to success for children. We also train parents to advocate for literacy to their neighbors and peers. Parents in our programs are more likely to engage in behaviors that research tells us will help their children become life-long readers

Our programs are transformative for families; our families transform communities.

LINC extends the impact of our programs by participating in multiple collective and collaborative efforts: LINC is the lead partner of **City's First Readers,** the New York City Council's sole early literacy initiative. Seventeen partner organizations strong, including all library systems, City's First Readers has delivered quality programming focused on families with children from birth through five years across all five boroughs for more than a decade. LINC is also the lead community partner of **UMECC - Upper Manhattan Early Childhood Connect,** working with **New York Presbyterian Hospital** and **Citizens Committee for Children** (CCC) to mobilize families with young children and local CBOs around early intervention and related developmental issues. UMECC participates in a consortium guided by CCC that involves United for Brownsville and the Hunts Point Alliance for Children. Since 2014, LINC has been an active partner of **NYC Reads,** a private/public collaboration of 11 partners serving the specific communities of South Jamaica, East New York, and East Harlem with a continuum of literacy programming from birth through 5th grade. LINC also participates in a collective impact education initiative led by The Staten Island Foundation, T**he Staten Island Alliance for North Shore Children and Families.** LINC is an active member of the **Literacy Advisory Council** and staunch advocate for early literacy at the **Center for Public Research and Leadership** (Columbia University), which is working closely with NYCPS to collaborate on the goal of having every New York City child reading proficiently by 2035. LINC recently joined the **Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF**).

FOR THE RECORD

LINC Literacy in Community

ORAL TESTIMONY:

Thank you for the chance to testify on education priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. My name is Albania Jimenez; I am the Chief of Advocacy and Community Mobilization at Literacy in Community, or LINC as we are also known. LINC provides early literacy programs in all five boroughs, serving families with children from birth through age five. Our goals are empowering families to prepare their children for school and instilling a life-long love of learning.

Over the past 12 years, the city has increasingly implemented educational programs that move into this space, outside the traditional K-12 framework. First Universal Pre-K, then 3K and most recently 2K. At the same time, the importance of childcare has risen as a political and economic priority. What we need now is a citywide framework that recognizes early literacy not as an optional enhancement, but as the heart of a child development system.

Why?

Learning to read starts from birth. Over 80% of a child's brain is developed by age three; 90% by age five. And the research is clear: experiences in the earliest years shape cognitive growth, executive functioning, and long-term academic, social, and health outcomes. The foundations of language development and reading ability are built long before a child ever enters a classroom.

If we are serious about reaching the ambitious NYC Reads goal of universal reading proficiency by 2035, we must infuse early literacy into universal childcare settings and into every early childhood system such as our pediatric public health system. By creating an Early Childhood subcommittee, the Council has taken an important step toward creating comprehensive oversight of what is currently a very fragmented portfolio. We at LINC applaud this progress and are eager to support the development of an early education ecosystem. We look forward to engaging with you around this goal.

Albania Jimenez
Chief of Advocacy & Community Mobilization
ajimenez@lincnyc.org

Visit our programs! | www.lincnyc.org

5030 Broadway, Suite 641
New York, NY 10034
212-620-5462 ext. 115

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITTEN TESTIMONY

LITERACY in COMMUNITY (LINC)

Literacy in Community (LINC) was founded in 1996 to improve the literacy outcomes of children living in some of NYC's highest poverty neighborhoods. Since its founding, LINC has viewed literacy as a social justice issue and our programming as a tool to achieve educational justice, itself the foundation of social justice.

Operating at the intersection of education and community mobilization, LINC leverages the aspirations of parents and caregivers and taps into existing resources. Every community has people who want the best for children, who want to help children succeed. Every New York City neighborhood has resources–schools. libraries, CBOs–but they are seldom mobilized in concert and in pursuit of a particular goal. LINC programs help the community to address the obstacles to success for children. We also train parents to advocate for literacy to their neighbors and peers. Parents in our programs are more likely to engage in behaviors that research tells us will help their children become life-long readers

Our programs are transformative for families; our families transform communities.

LINC extends the impact of our programs by participating in multiple collective and collaborative efforts: LINC is the lead partner of **City's First Readers,** the New York City Council's sole early literacy initiative. Seventeen partner organizations strong, including all library systems, City's First Readers has delivered quality programming focused on families with children from birth through five years across all five boroughs for more than a decade. LINC is also the lead community partner of **UMECC - Upper Manhattan Early Childhood Connect,** working with **New York Presbyterian Hospital** and **Citizens Committee for Children** (CCC) to mobilize families with young children and local CBOs around early intervention and related developmental issues. UMECC participates in a consortium guided by CCC that involves United for Brownsville and the Hunts Point Alliance for Children. Since 2014, LINC has been an active partner of **NYC Reads,** a private/public collaboration of 11 partners serving the specific communities of South Jamaica, East New York, and East Harlem with a continuum of literacy programming from birth through 5th grade. LINC also participates in a collective impact education initiative led by The Staten Island Foundation, T**he Staten Island Alliance for North Shore Children and Families.** LINC is an active member of the **Literacy Advisory Council** and staunch advocate for early literacy at the **Center for Public Research and Leadership** (Columbia University), which is working closely with NYCPS to collaborate on the goal of having every New York City child reading proficiently by 2035. LINC recently joined the **Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF**).

Hello good afternoon, my name is Andrea. I have been a Restorative Justice leader on campus at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. This is my third year coming here to speak.

I'm here because I care about real school safety, not just the appearance of safety. Every young person deserves to feel safe, respected, and supported in their school. That is not the case in the school I attend. Instead I've seen students get punished for going through real life struggles that they have no agency in. I've seen people get suspended for situations that could have been handled with a conversation, with understanding, and with care. While being an RJ youth leader, I've learned better ways to communicate, how to be accountable for my actions, and how to de-escalate conflict within my peers.

And yet the city continues to invest in more policing and surveillance instead of support.

As students, we feel that everyday. Walking into school, being greeted by security scanners, being checked with a wand, and seeing school safety with weapons on their belts. It doesn't make us feel safe, it makes us feel like we are the enemy, the problem.

This is not what safety looks like. Real safety looks like support. Real safety looks like being heard. Real safety looks like restorative justice.

So I'm asking you. Stop choosing punishment over support. Fully fund restorative justice in all schools and protect and expand our programs. And divest from excessive school policing.

Because students don't need more surveillance. We need more support. If you really care about our safety, then start listening to us.

Thank you for your time.

BROOKLYN	QUEENS	STATEN ISLAND	LONG ISLAND	WESTCHESTER
301 GROVE STREET	92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE	161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE	1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE	46 WALLER AVENUE
BROOKLYN, NY 11237	JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372	STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302	BRENTWOOD, NY 11717	WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL 718 418 7690	TEL 718 565 8500	TEL 718 727 1222	TEL 631 231 2220	TEL 914 948 8466
FAX 718 418 9635	FAX 718 565 0646	FAX 718 981 8077	FAX 631 231 2229	FAX 914 948 0311

Good afternoon, my name is Anyineldy Santana. I am 17-years-old and a senior at Academy for Excellence in Leadership. I am also a youth leader with Make the Road New York at the Bushwick Campus Student Success Center.

In my role, I guide my peers through every step of their post-secondary planning, exploring options, applying to colleges, and navigating financial aid. I also support them in the social-emotional aspects of decision-making, helping them stay focused, motivated, and confident about their futures. When I began high school, I wasn't sure what path to take. I was torn between psychology and nursing. But after completing my youth leader summer training and doing deeper research, I discovered my true passion: nursing, a career where I can make a direct impact on people's lives.

Being a Youth Leader has shown me just how essential a Student Success Center is on campus. It provides students with personalized, one-on-one support that helps them navigate high school and prepare for college with confidence. Without it, many students would be left to figure out complex processes like FAFSA and TAP on their own, often missing out on opportunities that could change their future.

My own family's story shows the difference a Student Success Center (SSC)can make. My big sister, who was also part of the Center, was the first in our immediate family to apply to college. She is now a first-year nursing major at CUNY City Tech. Watching her support students and serve as a role model inspired me to step into this role and become a Youth Leader myself. Now, I can provide the same guidance, encouragement, and inspiration to my peers that I once received. This work has not only taught me how to help others but also how to grow, lead, and unite my community toward their dreams. The SSC has given me a family of peers and mentors who push me to strive for excellence every day. They remind me that with support and determination, anything is possible.

If funding for SSCs is cut, thousands of students will lose access to guidance that can truly change the trajectory of their lives. We need the city to commit $3.3 million this year to sustain Student Success Centers across New York City. Supporting these centers is more than funding a program; it's investing in students like me, who are working every day to uplift our communities, mentor our peers, and create opportunities for the next generation. Every student deserves access to this support, and with your help, we can make that a reality.

I want to ensure that when my younger siblings reach high school, they will have the same guidance, encouragement, and opportunities that my sister and I have been fortunate to receive. The work of Student Success Centers changes lives, and together, we can make sure that no student is left behind.

BROOKLYN	QUEENS	STATEN ISLAND	LONG ISLAND	WESTCHESTER
301 GROVE STREET	92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE	161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE	1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE	46 WALLER AVENUE
BROOKLYN, NY 11237	JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372	STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302	BRENTWOOD, NY 11717	WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL 718 418 7690	TEL 718 565 8500	TEL 718 727 1222	TEL 631 231 2220	TEL 914 948 8466
FAX 718 418 9635	FAX 718 565 0646	FAX 718 981 8077	FAX 631 231 2229	FAX 914 948 0311

WWW.MAKETHEROADNY.ORG

Good afternoon, my name is Diaraye. I am a high school junior, and I'm a leader at Make the Road New York. Council Member Williams represents where I live in Jamaica, and Speaker Menin represents the area where I go to school.

I am here today, because I want New York City to invest more resources for mental health support, restorative justice and student success centers in my school. We do not need more school cops. There are six schools in my building. The majority of students walk through a main entrance where the first people they see every morning are school cops. It feels like I'm walking into jail. Their presence makes me feel like I've done something wrong or that I'm in trouble. I shouldn't have to feel this way. I come to school to learn. I want to feel like I belong there, but the constant presence of school cops makes me feel that people that come from where I come from are dangerous and need more surveillance. That's racist. Black immigrant students like me are capable of achieving amazing things, we just need genuine support and resources to grow. Instead of wasting money on school cops, we need to invest in real school safety, like restorative justice and mental health support.

School police cause direct harm to young people, they escalate conflicts in schools and disproportionately punish Black and Latinx students. There is no proof that school police prevent conflict in our schools. But yet, the New York City budget currently prioritizes funding school police, instead of fully funding my education. New York City has the largest school police force in the country. As Mayor Mamdani and this City Council begin making positive changes, we are calling on you to stop recruiting, hiring, and training school cops. If we stop hiring new school cops and cut the vacant school cop positions, we could immediately have millions of dollars to invest in real school safety!

Under the new federal administration, young people and schools are under attack. These threats are really scary. All young people deserve to feel safe and respected in school, regardless of immigration status. We need this New York City Council to pass a budget that protects young people and invests in real safety by expanding funding for restorative justice, mental health, and student success centers. In the near future I see myself going to college, going to law school, and becoming an immigration lawyer. Invest in me, invest in young people! We need police free schools now! Thank you.

Urban Youth Collaborative

Guadalupe's Testimony for Education Budget Hearing 3/23

Hello my name is Guadalupe. I am a high school senior and a youth leader at Make the Road New York. I came to the United States from Mexico at an early age, after spending r most of my childhood there. Starting school in New York City was a big adjustment, especially because in Mexico, we didn't have police in schools, only teachers and staff who supported us daily. It was difficult to get used to not seeing my teachers first thing in the morning and instead being yelled at by officers while going through metal detectors.

I've seen how fear and uncertainty affects students and families, especially with the ICE raids happening in our communities, which makes school feel unsafe for many of my peers. I faced many challenges adjusting to my new environment. One of the biggest challenges I faced when I came back to this country was discrimination. Students mocked the way I spoke because of my different accent. When I tried to make friends, other students ignored me, saying they didn't want to be friends with me because they didn't understand me. They also kept making fun of the way I dressed and how my mom did my hair because it didn't look like theirs.

What I didn't expect was facing the same discrimination and racism by adults who were supposed to be there to protect me. When my principal was disciplining me, I tried to advocate for myself by explaining that I was new and didn't realize I was breaking rules. That's when an elementary school officer commented on my background. He said, "it's because you are Mexican - that's why." The passive-aggressive tone made me feel humiliated and afraid to keep speaking up. At that moment, I didn't feel protected. I felt interrogated and silenced by authority, a feeling that I still remember now.

As a high school student, I've never felt safer than I do now. My school has strong mental health support. When my father was in and out of the hospital for two years, my counselors supported me every day and even organized a T- shirt fundraiser to help with his medical bills. They prioritize understanding over punishment, and it shows. We haven't had any major conflicts in my school. t Because of the strong and supportive community these student-centered resources create.

These resources are critical now, as many students fear family separation and harassment by any type of law enforcement. Without support, fear takes over, and learning stops. During the Adams administration, more funding went towards policing in our schools and communities than investing in care and support services. With the new Mamdani administration, there is an opportunity for the City Council and the new mayor to do better by prioritizing stronger investment in our education system. If more schools had student-centered support systems and resources earlier, students like me wouldn't have faced discrimination and fear from police officers.

NYC employs more school police than guidance counselors and social workers combined. Every day, students interact with school police far more than with counselors. This is especially dangerous for students like me who may face discrimination or have loved ones who ICE might target. We need schools to be spaces of learning and support, not fear or punishment.

I have seen firsthand that when schools invest in care and support, students succeed. I urge the City Council to redirect funding from school police to programs that actually keep students safe and supported, like mental health services, guidance counselors, and restorative justice programs. Every student deserves to feel safe and supported, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

Good afternoon. My name is Jairo Santamaria, I am 18 years old, and I am a senior at the Academy for Excellence in Leadership. I am also a youth leader with Make the Road New York at the Bushwick Campus Student Success Center. I am here today because the Student Success Center changed the direction of my life and allowed me to change the lives of others.

The Student Success Center (SSC) at Bushwick Campus, founded in 2007 through student advocacy, fills critical gaps in college support for underserved students. Today, SSCs are serving 34 high schools with over 17,000 students across the city, providing critical guidance, especially for first-generation, immigrant, low-income, and students of color, who have historically lacked adequate support in accessing higher education.

For this academic year, I have been a youth leader, and this opportunity has had a profound impact on my life. I have grown in confidence, communication, and leadership. Helping my fellow students is an honor. I have met new people, learned new things, and learned who I want to be when I grow up. I now support students and take on real responsibility as a leader. I discovered that I want to give back, support others, and create opportunities for those without guidance.

I joined the youth leader program because of my little brother. He is an 11-year-old 6th grader. I joined to show him what is possible and to make sure he has better opportunities and support when he reaches high school. I also wanted to make a difference in other people's lives.

At my school, there are only two guidance counselors for more than 250 students, which leaves a heavy weight to bear, and in terms of college counselors, there is only one on the entire campus, and her name is Ms.Vasquez. She is at our school because of the SSC, making a difference for so many students and helping guide their future. My responsibilities at SSC have allowed me to lend students a hand, whether helping them put in their information or providing them with assistance. I feel inspired to become a better person because of this opportunity, and have been inspired to do more good and offer my hand to others. I feel I've given all I've got to my students and the people I work with, whether my counselor or fellow youth leaders. I know in the future I will never be able to get the feeling I had while being a youth leader, but I hope one day I can come close to it.

This is why I am here today, standing before you all to urge the city council to make sure Student Success Centers like mine are funded, so that students like me can grow and become more. Investing in Student Success Centers means investing in students' futures, in our opportunities, and in stronger communities for all of us.

BROOKLYN
301 GROVE STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11237
TEL 718 418 7690
FAX 718 418 9635

QUEENS
92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372
TEL 718 565 8500
FAX 718 565 0646

STATEN ISLAND
161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302
TEL 718 727 1222
FAX 718 981 8077

LONG ISLAND
1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE
BRENTWOOD, NY 11717
TEL 631 231 2220
FAX 631 231 2229

WESTCHESTER
46 WALLER AVENUE
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL 914 948 8466
FAX 914 948 0311

WWW.MAKETHEROADNY.ORG

Good afternoon, my name is Sebastian, and I'm a senior in a community high school in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and a Make the Road New York leader. I've had the privilege of working with the Restorative Justice (RJ) coordinator at my school for 2 years now. I've learned how to emotionally regulate and help others do the same. I'm here to talk about restorative justice in schools and the importance of these programs.

New York City has an opportunity to create more space for RJ to happen in schools. Expanding the number of coordinators and providing staff with more de-escalation and circle training would help schools feel better equipped to handle student conflicts. With the right support, these situations could become meaningful conversations where students work through their differences together. Instead, students get suspended for issues that could have otherwise been resolved.

I've seen this firsthand in my school, where two of my close friends got into a fight, and afterward the school sat them down and forced them to resolve it on the spot. On the surface, it looked resolved, but the real problems were never addressed. Both of them still had grudges and animosity toward each other. The root of the conflict was never really talked through, and it all happened because there are not enough RJ practitioners on campus who can guide these conversations in a more thoughtful and lasting way.

The city decides where the money goes and what positions are created, and right now, restorative justice (RJ) is not receiving the investment it urgently needs. Schools require dedicated funding, trained staff, and protected time to implement RJ effectively. Students in this city deserve schools where conflict is treated as an opportunity for growth, not just punishment. Restorative justice is not an add-on; it is a proven approach that creates lasting, meaningful change in school communities.

By being an RJ youth leader, I have learned that the core foundation of RJ is building strong, healthy relationships. Schools are not consistently prioritizing community, and that is why we have low attendance rates, lower test scores, and more conflicts. RJ directly addresses these challenges by fostering environments where students feel seen, heard, and respected. It encourages accountability, empathy, and

collaboration. When implemented with intention, restorative justice transforms school culture into one that is safer, more connected, and more equitable.

Thank you for your time.

BROOKLYN
301 GROVE STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11237
TEL 718 418 7690
FAX 718 418 9635

QUEENS
92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372
TEL 718 565 8500
FAX 718 565 0646

STATEN ISLAND
161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302
TEL 718 727 1222
FAX 718 981 8077

LONG ISLAND
1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE
BRENTWOOD, NY 11717
TEL 631 231 2220
FAX 631 231 2229

WESTCHESTER
46 WALLER AVENUE
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL 914 948 8466
FAX 914 948 0311

WWW.MAKETHEROADNY.ORG

[redacted]

From: Mari Moss [redacted]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2026 9:36 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony on FERPA Violations, Parental Rights, and DOE Accountability

[redacted]

To the New York City Council,

I come before you today as a mother, a public servant, and an advocate who has dedicated her life to strengthening communities across this city.

What I am experiencing is not simply a personal hardship—it is a serious failure of systems that are meant to protect families and uphold the law.

I have been denied access to fundamental information about my children's education, including where they attend school and the ability to participate in their academic lives.

This is not a matter of confusion. It is a matter of federal law.

Under FERPA, both parents retain rights to access educational records unless those rights are explicitly revoked through a lawful court order. No such order has been provided.

Instead, custody appears to be used as a blanket justification to deny access—contrary to federal law.

This raises a broader and more urgent concern:

If this can happen to me, how many other parents in New York City are being unlawfully excluded from their children's education?

I have filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Education.

But local oversight is essential.

The NYC Department of Education manages one of the largest public budgets in the country. With that funding must come accountability.

I respectfully urge the Council:

- Conduct oversight hearings on FERPA compliance within NYC DOE
- Require reporting and transparency on parental access rights

- Investigate whether custody is being misapplied to deny lawful rights
- Establish clear enforcement mechanisms to protect parents

And importantly:

No expansion of DOE funding should occur without demonstrated accountability and compliance with federal law.

Funding must be tied to integrity.

No parent should be erased from their child's education.

Respectfully,
Hon. Mari Moss, MPA

Mari Moss, MPA
Mother of Calia, Sophia and Anya
CEO/ President Midas Touch Consulting
We Love Harlem Initiative https://www.linkedin.com/in/marimoss
917-682-9659(o) [redacted]
Volunteer work
Neighborhood Advisory Board 10
Community Action Board Region 9

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 550, New York NY 10115 / 212-870-3318 / www.morningsidecenter.org

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council
Budget and Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027
The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and
The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Hon. Eric Dinowitz, Chair, City Council Education Committee

23 March 2026

Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and the committee. My name is Dr. Cassie Schwerner; I am the Executive Director of Morningside Center (MSC).

As you may know we are one of the DOE's primary partners in delivering restorative justice practices (RJ/ RP) and services to NYC public schools. I am glad to testify today because sometimes exactly what "restorative practices" are—and how they work—are not clear to people that haven't spent time in schools.

At MSC we weave the important strands of SEL, restorative practices and equity together with the goal of creating a healthy school climate and culture. As I recently heard Chancellor Samuels say in a speech celebrating Dr. King, our kids, especially our boys—and our boys of color—need to be in touch with their emotions. That is part of what SEL is and an important aspect of restorative work. At MSC we train and coach educators to integrate circles in their classrooms, leading them in advisories, and that too is part of restorative work. But it is also so much more.

Let me tell you about the phone calls from school staff that I field each and every day:

1. At a mostly white and Asian Queens school with a tiny population of Black and Latinx/e students… there are white kids calling brown kids the N-word. The principal knows that is not okay but is not sure what to do.
2. At a transfer school there are older students that are under-credited because teachers don't know how to deal with the types of behaviors they are seeing—right now, more than ever.
3. A school in Sunset Park, where the fourth and fifth graders are involved in what you and I would call "cyber bulling," needs coaching on ways to deal with the bullying and the harm it has caused.
4. A Queens school that has had a problem with knife fights outside the building where young people have been harmed needs help keeping students safe inside the building.
5. Leaders of a school in downtown Brooklyn want peer mediation training for their fourth and fifth graders.
6. A school investigation of anti-Semitic graffiti in the bathroom unearthed multitudes of racial and anti-Semitic harms.

But I have also seen schools where the work we and other RJ providers do creates incredible change with lasting impact.

- At a school with all ICT classrooms where we have worked diligently with love and care—first graders—several of whom are neurodiverse (including on the autism spectrum)—can now sit and share in a circle; read a book and talk about the emotions of the characters they read about; create a circle space with the skills to say to their neighbor, "that hurts my feelings when…" These littles developed such skills after our Staff Developer (trainer/coach, SD) introduced deep breathing work and then movement work including dance. All of this before asking young students to sit in circle with accountability to one another. The first-year teacher in that classroom did not have those skills. But she has them now, and I have watched her use them successfully.
- I have seen schools with Muslim students and Palestinian students who have been so angry and hurt by what they see on their phones for months on end—where our Staff Developer and the school RJ Coordinator held spaces for students to process their feelings and needs then meet with staff to share the classroom practices that unintentionally exacerbated their experiences of isolation and alienation.
- I have seen schools that received gifted days from grant funding to Morningside—more than 20 days—use their own resources to then buy more days because the work was so necessary AND impactful.
- This year we witnessed virtual workshops designed for 300 paras in District 6 learning conflict resolution skills where I was stunned by the engagement and conversation that took place in just 90 minutes.
- We have worked with a District 75 (special education) school where non-verbal kids could finally participate in circle thanks to a very well trained and experienced member of our team. Imagine the joy a young non-verbal child feels when they can see and be seen by other children they see communicating, laughing and playing together every day.
- In healing circles we designed and provided for students (and staff) who lost a classmate (and student), children wrote down memories and joined hands to send collective well-wishes toward the skies… Again, imagine the relief. Imagine how this changes the future for these children who now have healthy ways to process grief and hold on to celebrations of life.

I could go on adding stories about principal coaching, family workshops, workshops for parent coordinators, social workers, crisis teams.

But my point is this:

We are living through a catastrophic time in our city's, country's and world's history. Our SEL needs, emotional and mental health needs, are absolutely overwhelming—not only for all the families terrified by ICE, all the unhoused families whose children go to our schools, but also all the families of trans kids, all the littles who will be diagnosed at some point as being on the

autism spectrum or having ADHD but right now don't have a name or remedy for the shame they experience in the classroom. I think of the young child at Ralph Bunche in District 5 who lost her mother and when she saw our staff developer, ran up to give her a hug, and then those little arms hugging me—a sign of love by association: if I was a friend of Marieke's I must be a kind soul. I am confident that having this love from her school community will carry this child through.

The idea that we—as a wealthy city in a wealthy state in a wealthy nation can spend billions of dollars a day on an unnecessary war—could cut these vital services for kids and educators, now that is impossible for me to understand.

The neuroscience is clear: our brains are hard-wired for connection. It is the fundamental base layer of safety from which we are capable of learning and growth.

We need to be in relationship, but often we don't know how.

When our students connect, feel safe and have a voice, are seen for who they are, we know that is when the amygdala can relax, the fight-flight-freeze instinct can calm and real learning can take place.

None of what I describe here is taught in graduate school. Teachers and principals don't receive classes to learn how to intentionally build healthy relationships with and between children, to make children feel safe.

It is organizations including Morningside and other vendor partners that help ensure this can be part of our public school experience. And change the future of our city.

Thank you,

Cassie Schwerner l Executive Director| she/her/hers
Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility
www.morningsidecenter.org

NYSUNWORKS
HYDROPONIC CLASSROOMS

Testimony of NY Sun Works
NYC Council Budget and Oversight Hearing
23 March 2026

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to speak today and for your ongoing commitment to our public school system.

My name is Megan Nordgrén, and I am the Director of Development and Government Relations with NY Sun Works, a non-profit organization that builds Hydroponic Farm Classrooms in NYC public schools. In our farm classrooms, we use hydroponic technology to educate students and teachers about the science of sustainability and bring quality STEM education through the lens of urban farming. We envision a generation of environmental innovators, empowered to create solutions to global climate challenges. Since opening our first Hydroponic Classroom in 2010, we have partnered with over 350 schools, reaching more than 140,000 students annually in New York City and beyond.

Two weeks ago, the New York Board of Regents passed new requirements for climate education, ensuring that kindergarten - 12th grade students will learn about the causes, impacts and solutions to the climate crisis. The requirement will go into effect in the 2027-2028 school year beginning with grades 5-12 and grades K-4 in the 2028-29 school year.

As an organization that has been bringing climate education into NYC public schools for 16 years, we applaud this decision. Students and teachers statewide overwhelmingly support an increased focus on climate education to achieve a greater understanding of the causes, impacts and solutions to climate change. It is our responsibility to prepare students to confront the challenges of our times, and science is our greatest tool.

However, these new climate education requirements currently represent an unfunded mandate for NYC schools. Without dedicated resources schools (many of which are

already under major financial strain) will be expected to implement new curriculums and train educators without the necessary support.

Organizations like NY Sun Works are uniquely positioned to help bridge this gap. NY Sun Works works directly with NYC public schools to provide hydroponic classrooms and training for educators. By investing in programs like ours, the city can ensure climate education is not only implemented but implemented effectively and equitably across all 5 boroughs.

We also pride ourselves on being flexible and responsive partners to NYC schools. We work closely with principals and educators to implement our program to each schools' specific needs, capacity, financial and space constraints. Our goal is to make climate and STEM education accessible to any school that wants it, and we are committed to collaborating with the city and elected officials to expand access wherever there is interest.

We urge you to invest in climate education for our children that attend public schools throughout the 5 boroughs and support partners like NY Sun Works in delivering this critical work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Megan Nordgrén

NY Sun Works

New York City Arts in Education Roundtable

Written Testimony: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Education

Hon. Eric Dinowitz

Monday, March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and the City Council for hosting today's hearing and happy Arts in our Schools Month! My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable.

I'm testifying as part of the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to protect arts education by increasing per-student funding to $100, hiring certified arts teachers and restructuring the successful supplemental arts certification program to help meet the class size mandate, baselining funds for the Department of Cultural Affairs which helps embed teaching artists in our schools and communities ($30M), and investing in the Support for Arts Instruction Initiative ($6M) to help bridge the gap in arts participation.

Our city's access gap is a direct result of an accountability gap. Currently, our ability to track the impact of city investments in arts education is significantly hampered by a decline in data transparency. While we advocate for the increased funding needed to reach every child, we must simultaneously demand the restoration of the transparency metrics that have receded since the pandemic.

For context: nearly 20 years ago, NYC eliminated Project Arts — a citywide initiative that ensured NYC schools had dedicated funding per student for arts education. This money was used to pay for supplies, teachers, arts instruction, and residencies with teaching artists. It now exists in the School Allocation Memos as an unmonitored recommendation, and we advocate it to be restored as required spending.

In 2007, to try to ensure schools maintained arts programs in the absence of required funding, the City developed the stop-gap ArtsCount survey and the annual Arts in Schools Report. However, the amount of data that is reported by these surveys has shrunk significantly over the years, especially since COVID. Some of the data points no longer reported on include:

- Arts education enrollment rates
- Elementary instructional hours in the arts
- Arts Spaces in schools
- Family/parent involvement
- And arts education quality (to name a few)

We need to build upon the Term & Condition included in Schedule C to include these metrics. This disappearance of reporting since the pandemic has effectively shielded systemic inequities from public view, stalling our progress toward universal arts access. Yet, what data we do have continues to show that less than a third of middle schoolers are meeting NYS arts learning requirements. That's unacceptable.

These issues of transparency extend beyond offered instruction — meaning opaque contracting processes for arts nonprofits and obscured timelines for approval that can stretch 18-28 months long ultimately lead to lost learning opportunities.

What gets measured gets done. To ensure our City's decisions and spending are based on the most reliable insights, it's important to address these information gaps. Strengthening transparency will help us move forward with a more balanced perspective and allow us to make more informed, evidence-based decisions. Only then can we truly work to sustain and grow this vibrant ecosystem.

We have a window of opportunity to define our city's future: **that starts with the arts.** Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to invest in our students and our workforce. This includes:

ADDRESS COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS FOR ARTS EDUCATION WORKFORCE

- **Continue reforms to contracting with city agencies.** specifically targeting NYCPS' Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) and CASA contracts, to ensure timely contract remittance and payments, accessible processes, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor.
- **Launch insurance pilots to support teaching artist affordability.** Aligned with Creatives Rebuild NY and the Center for an Urban Future, NYC can reduce economic precarity for the arts workforce by piloting a freelancers portable benefits program and a pooled insurance program for smaller orgs.
- **Restore and Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs ($30M).** Baselining this one-time addition supports arts organizations and workers city-wide, offering sector-wide stabilization and preventing further artist displacement.

PRESERVING & IMPROVING ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

- **Require NYCPS arts funding be spent on the arts.** Boost the per student arts allocation to $100 from $89.76, and require that allocated money be spent on arts education.
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teacher:** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, in part by reviving the successful supplemental arts certification program ($4M) and funding a PE Works-inspired improvement plan using the already baselined arts education funding.
- **Restore and Enhance "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding.** Increase allocation from $4M to $6M to meet city-wide demand for increased arts learning opportunities.
- **Improve arts education data transparency.** Require mandatory reporting on school-level arts education access, participation/enrollment, spending, and MTAC procurement (R1129/R1180) via T&C.
- **Update the NYCPS Blueprint for Arts Learning** to define sequential pathways for arts learning that integrate culturally-responsive pedagogy and reflect rapid advancements in media and technology (last updated in 2015).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

New York City Council
Commitee on Education

Learning to Work
March 23, 2026

Testimony Presented By
Michael De Vito Jr.
Executive Director
NYCID

Good morning, Council Members.

My name is Michael De Vito Jr. from the New York Center for Interpersonal Development — NYCID. We have been delivering Learning to Work programming on Staten Island for nearly two decades, and I am here because once again — we don't know if this program will exist in its current form come July. Not because it failed. Because it still isn't baselined.

Let me give you the numbers that matter. Students in Transfer Schools with LTW support are 51.4% more likely to graduate than peers without it. 97% of LTW interns graduate. 97%. Compare that to 62% without the program. These are not projections. This is what's happening right now in our schools, with our kids.

And yet — $31 million dollars, the amount that keeps this program running, is set to expire in June. Money that used to come from City Tax Levy. Money that got quietly shifted to federal stimulus dollars during the pandemic and never shifted back. Our young people didn't create that problem. They shouldn't bear the cost of it.

We are also watching an RFP process that, in its current form, threatens to dismantle the very model that produced those outcomes. We are calling on NYCPS to align that RFP to what the Eskolta Report tells us works — not redesign what isn't broken.

The ask is clear: baseline $31 million for LTW in the FY2027 Executive Budget. Don't make us come back here next year. And the year after that. Our kids deserve stability. Our providers deserve to plan. And this city deserves to stop paying later for what we refuse to invest in now.

Fund LTW. Baseline it. Let's stop having this conversation.

Thank you.

nysut
A Union of Professionals

800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455 ■ (518) 213-6000 ■ www.nysut.org

Melinda Person
President
Jaime L. Ciffone
Executive Vice President
Ronald Gross
Second Vice President
J. Philippe Abraham
Secretary-Treasurer

March 19, 2026

Honorable Members of the New York City Council
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Member,

I'm writing to express my strong support for the Para Respect Check proposal Int 0692-2026 (CM De La Rosa) being championed by the United Federation of Teachers.

Paraprofessionals are the backbone of our public schools. They support our most vulnerable students, provide critical instructional assistance, and help create safe, inclusive learning environments every single day. Yet far too many of these essential educators are forced to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

That's not just unsustainable—it's unjust.

At New York State United Teachers, we've been clear: one job should be enough. Enough to pay the bills. Enough to support a family. Enough to live with dignity in the communities they serve.

The Para Respect Check proposal is a meaningful step toward that goal. It recognizes the professionalism, dedication, and essential contributions of paraprofessionals by ensuring their compensation reflects the value they bring to our schools and our students.

When we invest in paraprofessionals, we are investing in student success. We are strengthening school communities. And we are sending a clear message about the kind of city—and state—we want to be: one that respects workers, values education, and believes that those who serve our children should not struggle to survive.

I urge you to support this proposal and stand with paraprofessionals across New York City.

In solidarity,

Melinda Person

Melinda Person
President, New York State United Teachers

PARENTS SUPPORTING PARENTS
NEW YORK

Good morning Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Tanesha Grant, Founder and Executive Director of Parents Supporting Parents New York—a Black-woman-led organization, built by parents, for parents.

We are proud to stand as a member organization of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding and support their funding recommendations .

And let me be very clear
PSPNY is not theoretical.
We are on the ground, every single day, doing the work this system has failed to do.

We are educating Black parents.
We are organizing Black families.
We are helping our community understand how to navigate a system that was never designed with us in mind.

I know what it feels like to be unseen in classrooms that lack care and cultural understanding. And when I became a parent at 18, I realized that this system doesn't just fail children… It abandons parents too.

So we built something different.
Not just a seat at the table, we built our own table.

And now I'm here to say: your budget must catch up to the reality we are living in and the Anti-Blackness we are dealing with!

First: Fund parent empowerment like it actually matters.

Black parents are still being left in the dark about:

- Title I Funding;
- School Leadership Teams;
- Parent Advisory Councils; and
- CECs

And then blamed for not being “engaged.”

Let’s be honest, that is not a parent problem.
That is a funding and access problem.

If you are serious about equity, then invest in:

- Parent leadership
- Grassroots organizations
- And real, culturally responsive outreach!

Because at PSPNY, we are already doing the work **without the resources.**

Second: stop playing with the Black Studies Curriculum. Fund it fully. Implement it properly. Our children deserve to see themselves in their education every single day, not just during February.

And if teachers are not trained, and schools are not held accountable, then it is just another empty promise.

Third: our children deserve dignified learning environments.
Not buildings that exclude them.

We need:

- Fully ADA-accessible schools
- And sensory-friendly, standalone spaces for students with autism

Because inclusion cannot just be a word, it has to be built into the space.

Fourth: Black businesses cannot keep getting shut out.
NYCPS talks about MWBE goals, but Black-led businesses are still at the bottom.

That is not equity. That is exclusion with better branding.

We need accountability. Period.

And finally, our children are still being denied what they are legally owed.

- Special education services.

- Mental health supports.
- Literacy intervention.

These are not extras.
These are rights.

So let me close with this:

PSPNY exists because parents needed support, and the system did not provide it.

We are not asking you to recognize the problem.
We are telling you to empower us to help you solve it.

The question is, are you going to fund it?

Because a budget is not just numbers.
It is priorities.
It is values.
It is who you choose to show up for.

And today, we are asking you to show up for Black families in NYCPS
with real investment, real accountability, and real change.

Thank you.

Tanesha Grant, ED of Parents Supporting Parents NY

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York
44 Court St, 4th Fl, Brooklyn, NY 11201
ppgreaterny.org 212-274-7200

Fiscal Year 2027 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Education

March 23rd, 2026

Good morning. My name is Morgan Little, and I am the Associate Vice President of Education & Training at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). We would like to thank the Chair of the Committee on Education, Council Member Dinowitz, and all the committee members for the opportunity to discuss PPGNY's programs, services, and fiscal year 2027 funding requests. Thank you to the Chair of the Finance Committee, Council Member Lee, and Speaker Julie Menin for your continued support of PPGNY's work to provide health care to all New Yorkers.

PPGNY is a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2025, we conducted over 67,000 patient visits through our virtual health center and at our NYC health centers, providing care to all regardless of immigration status, identity, or ability to pay for services. We engaged over 28,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs — including over 4,400 young people in middle and high school. Our Project Street Beat program (PSB), through its office and Mobile Health Center, engaged over 650 individuals who are at high risk of HIV exposure, may be unstably housed, or suffer from substance abuse disorder. And in 2025, we helped enroll over 3,700 individuals in health insurance programs.

We are deeply committed to providing care, no matter what. For several years, we have weathered many attempts to severely restrict sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion care. Years of under-investment in reproductive health care, rising health care costs, and workforce shortages have made it increasingly difficult for us to provide the care New Yorkers depend on. In fact, we were forced to close our Manhattan health center last year to help sustain patient care throughout the city. Patients seen in Manhattan are able to continue to receive care at our three remaining NYC health centers and through our virtual health center.

Since the Trump-Vance administration has been in office, we have seen the devastating impact their policies have had on young people and this country's education system as we know it. The administration has recently taken steps to dismantle the Department of Education, potentially leaving millions of young people, but especially low-income students and students with disabilities, without critical resources and civil rights protections they depend on. They have also enacted a series of harmful executive orders that target LGBTQAI+ youth which includes blocking gender affirming care for young people under 19 and withholding federal funds from schools that promote an inclusive environment for transgender and gender nonconforming

youth.[1] Additionally, the administration may again force providers out of the Title X program, one of the only federally funded programs for sexual and reproductive health. The program supports access to family planning resources and preventative care for young people and prioritizes their ability to access resources confidentially. We anticipate programs that support young people, and their families will continue to be dismantled.

Despite this challenging reality, PPGNY remains committed to providing quality health care services and educational programs to communities, no matter what. We appreciate that the City Council continues to support PPGNY so that we can remain a critical source of care, particularly for thousands of patients who qualify for health services for free or at reduced cost.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Education for New Yorkers

We are deeply committed to empowering youth and ensuring that young people can access the health care and education they deserve. At a time when sexual and reproductive health care providers are facing renewed attacks on federal funding and access to care nationwide, it is more important than ever that young people in New York City have access to accurate information and trusted resources. The threats to health care funding on the federal level, combined with ongoing legislative efforts in several states to restrict gender-affirming care for LGBTQ+ youth, make local investments in youth programs even more critical. **Today, we respectfully request funding from the Speaker's initiative to support our Education and Training (E&T) team, which includes our Youth Health Promoters (YHP) and youth serving programs.**

In 2025, E&T engaged over 6,800 individuals through our programs at schools and in the community, 5,498 of which were young people under 21 years old. Our E&T team collaborates with stakeholders across NYC to provide evidence-informed and evidence-based workshops for young people. These workshops are provided by both our adult sexuality educators and our YHPs, who are highly trained peer educators that directly engage other young people. They conduct interactive workshops to educate their peers about their rights, including how to access care, and how to overcome barriers and stigma that teens may experience. In 2025, our YHP program engaged over 1,000 young people throughout New York City. We also provide professional development to youth-serving adults on sexual and reproductive health topics to support their capacity in engaging young people at their community-based organizations and in schools.

Our E&T team is unique in our holistic approach to our programs supporting youth. We provide credible peer messaging to advance sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people throughout New York City. The programs leverage social media that promotes health care access in fun and interactive ways. In 2025, PPGNY's NowUKnow Instagram reached thousands of

---

[1] [1] *Background on trump executive order attacking LGBTQ+ students, their...* HRC. (n.d.). https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/background-on-trump-executive-order-attacking-lgbtq-students-their-educators-and-the-freedom-for-all-children-to-learn

young people and promoted opportunities for youth to participate in sexual & reproductive health rights & access workshops at schools and in the community.

Funding from the City Council will allow PPGNY to continue our youth engagement work that ensures more young people have access to the care they need. It will also help expand our ability to support young people whose health and academic needs often go unsupported. This includes young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Research has highlighted that students with IDD are more susceptible to adverse health outcomes when they do not have access to a comprehensive support network and tools to make informed health care decisions. One program in particular, Project Shine, works with students and a network of caregivers and providers to develop and implement tools that advocate for the needs and improve the health of youth with IDD.

Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students in NYC Schools

PPGNY requests $100,000 from LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Curriculum initiative, to support the unique needs queer LGBTQIA identifying students. With this funding, PPGNY will further our partnerships with the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) and NYC high schools to provide professional development opportunities for high school and youth development staff. This includes teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals, and school nurses. School staff play a critical role in shaping the daily environment students experience and are essential partners in fostering affirming and inclusive schools for LGBTQIA+ young people and families. PPGNY proposes to adapt and deliver its LGBTQIA+ Affirming Practice Asynchronous Online Training to NYC school and after-school staff. The training will consist of a 40-minute asynchronous module facilitated through slides, animation, and interactive elements.

PPGNY has implemented a similar training with the City of Ithaca DOE school staff; funding would enable us to tailor our existing framework and module to reflect the lived experiences of NYC communities. This training could be integrated into the NYC DOE learning management system (LMS) to ensure accessibility for hundreds of teachers and school staff. If not, it could be accessed via PPGNY's existing LMS.

In 2025, our education team served over 4,400 middle and high school students in schools throughout the city. Following national sexuality education standards, our education team crafts age-appropriate, gender-inclusive, and culturally competent workshops that educate young people on a variety of sexual health topics. This information equips young people with information to make informed health decisions. This instruction includes information on human development: including puberty, anatomy, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It also helps young people safely navigate romantic and platonic relationships, and develop personal skills including setting boundaries, negotiating, and decision-making. Additionally, young people learn about sexual and reproductive health care services that are available to them and their right to secure the care they need.

Safeguarding Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care in NYC

Lastly, we ask the Council to continue to fund PPGNY through the Reproductive and Sexual and Health Initiative to ensure that New Yorkers can continue to access care close to home.

PPGNY requests increased funding of $600,000 from the initiative, which will allow us to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Funding from this initiative helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all three of our NYC health centers. This care includes 55,000 STI tests, over 20,000 HIV tests, over 39,000 family planning visits, and over 700 PrEP/PEP care visits provided to New Yorkers last year. We provide care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns.

This funding also supports trainings for staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, this funding will support our YHP program.

Conclusion

PPGNY remains committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers can access the sexual and reproductive health care they need, regardless of immigration status, identity, or ability to pay. At a time when access to this care is under threat nationwide, continued investment from the Council is essential to ensure access to services among our city's most vulnerable communities. We look forward to continuing to partner with the Council to ensure that every New Yorker can access the care and programmatic support that they deserve.

Thank you.

###

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) is a leading provider, educator, and advocate of sexual and reproductive health care in New York State. PPGNY offers a wide range of services across 65% of NYS - including gynecological care; birth control; cancer screenings; pregnancy testing; STI testing and treatment; HIV prevention, testing, and counseling; transgender hormone therapy; and vasectomy. PPGNY is also proud to provide abortion services to anyone who needs compassionate, non-judgmental care. PPGNY is a trusted source of medically accurate, evidence-based information that allows people to make informed decisions about their health and future. As a voice for reproductive freedom, PPGNY supports legislation and policies that ensure all New Yorkers have access to the full range of reproductive health services and education

Testimony of Rachel Jordan, Safe Passage Project
NYC Council Committee on Education
March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and the other members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Rachel Jordan, and I am the Managing Attorney for Partnerships and Advocacy at Safe Passage Project, a non-profit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We currently serve over 1,600 children and young people who live in the five boroughs of New York City and on Long Island.

Safe Passage Project works closely with partner organizations through the ICARE Coalition, with the goal of providing high quality legal representation to as many unaccompanied minors as possible. Once we accept a client, we commit to their case until we achieve the best possible outcome for them, usually a green card. Our clients' cases typically take 3-7 years due to delays in visa availability and court backlogs. We receive funding from the City Council through UMFI, the SIJS Initiative, School-Based Immigrant Rapid Response, Speaker's Initiative, and DoVE. The City Council's unwavering support for immigrant children through these initiatives has been groundbreaking on a national level and has shown that local initiatives to advance universal representation for immigrant youth can be truly transformative.

These initiatives not only enable us to fight in court for children to gain lawful status in the U.S., they also enable our incredible social work team to make sure that these children can live their day-to-day lives in safety and security by assisting them with school enrollment and connecting them to critical mental and medical health resources, shelters, and food assistance programs. This critical aspect of our work is more essential than ever as the federal government's anti-immigrant policies put immigrant children and their families at unprecedented risk.

Our social workers collaborate closely with school guidance counselors to address the school-related challenges our young clients face, including attendance problems and bullying. One example involves two Safe Passage clients, a young mother and her 7-year-old daughter, both with approved Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). The mother had always ensured that her daughter had excellent attendance at her elementary school. Then, in January 2025, the

mother grew so terrified by the federal administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric that she kept her daughter home from school for over a week, fearing rumored ICE arrests. It was the conversations the mother had with her daughter's Safe Passage social worker and her school guidance counselor, together with a memo from the school laying out its commitment to NYC's sanctuary city policies, that eventually convinced her that it was safe for her daughter to return to school.

Another Safe Passage Project client, a high school student, recently experienced severe bullying from a classmate who sent him numerous threatening texts. Working together, his Safe Passage social worker and school guidance counselor helped him to pursue a school safety transfer. Despite the client's fear that law enforcement involvement of any kind could expose his undocumented family members to ICE enforcement, they also convinced him to report the threats to the NYPD for his own safety.

Increased Funding for Children's Legal Services

We strongly urge this Committee to support immigrant children at this frightening time by safeguarding and increasing funding for immigrant children's legal services. The federal government's daily attacks on immigrant youth and their families have taken a severe toll, and together with the systemic stripping of due process rights in Immigration Court and the increase in brutal ICE enforcement tactics, Safe Passage Project's already hard-working team of attorneys and social workers are being pushed to the limit to prevent the unjust incarceration and deportation of our clients. Every week these challenges increase, requiring our staff to dedicate more time and resources to protecting the rights of our clients.

Safe Passage Project is deeply grateful for the support provided through the School-Based Immigrant Rapid Response initiative, as guidance counselors, educators, and principals at NYC Department of Education schools are a crucial source of new client referrals for our organization and serve as an important bridge connecting immigrant children to free legal services. We urge the City Council to increase funding for this important initiative, so that Safe Passage Project can meet the increasingly complex legal and social work needs of immigrant children at this historic moment. ###

Testimony of the New York City School Construction Authority
on the Proposed FY2027 Preliminary Capital Budget:
SCA/NYCPS Proposed February 2026 Amendment to the
FY2025-FY2029 Five-Year Capital Plan
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

Nina Kubota, President and CEO, New York City School Construction Authority

Good afternoon Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. My name is Nina Kubota, and I am the President and CEO of the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA). I am joined by the Deputy Chancellor for School Operations, Kevin Moran, from New York City Public Schools, and by Cora Liu, Vice President of Capital Plan Management for the SCA. We are pleased to be here today to discuss the proposed SCA/NYC Public Schools' Fiscal Years 2025-2029 Five-Year Capital Plan, which currently totals $20.97 billion.

Since the SCA's inception in 1988, we have opened over 319,000 school seats, more than the entire student population in the fifth largest school district in the nation in Las Vegas. In our history, through FY25, we have obligated roughly $77 billion which equates to about 17,000 construction projects. We are immensely proud of our history, and I am happy to be before you today to talk about the future we are working towards for the public school students of New York City.

Our current five-year capital plan spans Fiscal Years 2025-2029 and is broken up into four main categories: Capacity, Capital Improvement, Healthy Schools, and Mandated.

Each category is dedicated to addressing key elements of the buildings in our portfolio, from safety and security, to making our buildings sustainable, adding needed capacity, and enhancing student learning environments. We know our work is vital to how our students learn, play, and grow, and we strive each and every day towards our mission of achieving the highest standards of excellence in safety, quality, and integrity.

We believe in our mission so strongly that last month we hosted a forum bringing together the top architects and engineers in the country to launch our new Design Excellence program. Our team at the SCA is striving to push the boundaries of what is possible in our physical school spaces understanding the direct impact of educational facilities on learning outcomes. We have told the architecture and engineering communities that New York City's students are the most important clients in the world, and we are demanding nothing short of the very best.

This past September, we celebrated the opening of our largest building ever, a 3,066-seat high school in Woodside, Queens. We are immensely proud of this project, as it was designed from start

to finish by our own in-house architects and engineers. This site, which once stood as a big box store and then as a COVID testing center, is now home to four high schools including a D75 school. While we are incredibly proud of this project, this was just one of the 15 projects that were completed by September 2025 adding over 6,600 seats to the public school portfolio.

Our new schools are funded through the Capacity category. In the Proposed February 2026 Amendment to the Plan, we have allocated a total of $6.98 billion to support seat creation throughout the city. This category is further broken down into distinct programs to address specific needs.

The first, and most recognizable, is New Capacity, which totals $6.13 billion. This program funds our new schools and new seats in existing schools and will be used to comply with the state's class size law. This funding will allow us to create over 33,000 seats citywide through various types of projects, including new buildings, additions, annexes, mixed-use buildings, leased spaces, and interior room conversions that provide targeted support to schools in existing buildings. To date, there have been 14,318 seats sited in this Plan. Of those, 1,349 seats are newly identified in this February Amendment from 8 new projects. Roughly 20 months into our current capital plan, I am happy to report that we have sited 43% of the seats currently funded.

But Capacity is more than just the creation of new school seats. In addition to the New Capacity Program, there are three other programs that are included in the Capacity category: Replacement, Temporary Structure Removal, and Early Education.

The Replacement program is currently $400 million and is allocated to schools whose building must be replaced, most commonly due to an expiring lease. A new building for PS 106 in Queens is an example of a vital project that is being funded through this program and is scheduled to be bid and awarded by the end of June and will open in September 2029.

The Temporary Structure Removal program, funded at $250 million, allows us to continue the work of removing Transportable Classroom Units (TCUs) and other temporary structures that were placed in school yards during the enrollment boom of the late 90s/early 2000s, but have become more permanent than any of us wanted. Out of the roughly 350 TCUs we started with, we have only 23 remaining without a removal plan at just 5 sites. In addition, there are 54 sites that have temporary structures and 16 of them already have an identified removal plan. Through this program, we can remove what, in many instances, have become an eyesore for the school and surrounding community, and either build the needed capacity at the school or return an enhanced, brand-new playground back to our students.

A great example of the impact of this program is the project we did at P.S. 195/196 in the Bronx. We removed one of the temporary structures which allowed us to open an addition in 2024 which included not only 25 classrooms but also a new kitchen and cafeteria, library, art and music rooms, science resource rooms, exercise and playrooms as well as reading and other resource rooms.

Now, we plan on bidding and awarding the next phase of this project which will remove the second temporary building on the school's property and deliver beautiful outdoor play space.
The last program in the Capacity category is Early Childhood which, funded at $200 million, allows us to continue the transfer of the former ACS sites to the NYCPS portfolio.

As I have outlined, our capacity work encompasses a wide range of projects, but we understand the topic on everyone's mind right now is class size. Today, and as we did through a joint letter when we published the February Amendment, we reaffirm our strong and coordinated partnership with City Hall and NYC Public Schools to meet class size compliance requirements. This is a shared, system-wide effort that aligns capital investments with operational strategies to deliver tangible results for students. We remain fully committed to ensuring every student learns in an environment that supports stronger outcomes and individualized attention.

Since the start of the Mamdani Administration, there is a laser focus on class size compliance and the SCA and NYCPS partnership has strengthened. Meeting class size mandates at this scale requires thoughtful planning and execution that goes beyond just building and adding more seats. We have taken a complete 360-degree view of the school portfolio, going subdistrict by subdistrict looking at both individual schools as well as clusters of schools to identify targeted solutions from a range of options that include capital and non-capital strategies. We've also aligned capital strategies with NYCPS's survey data from all principals as part of this effort. We now have a clear understanding of our facilities from our principals who know their buildings best. We are examining where additions and annexes are possible and aligning that with the survey data. We have also taken a holistic geographic look as to where key real estate is needed that can alleviate several schools in the surrounding area. Lastly, we have also identified key land use changes and improvements that will make it easier for us to identify sites and site schools, and we look forward to working with the teams at City Hall on these potential actions. It is the partnership between our two agencies, led by City Hall, and the marrying of capital and non-capital strategies that will allow us to achieve class size compliance.

Our work is guided by four core principles: Maximize existing space across the system to its fullest potential; Pursue practical "quick wins," such as room conversions that rapidly increase instructional capacity; Target investments to schools and districts with the greatest space needs; and advance equity by prioritizing underserved communities with the highest deficits.

Every seat we site is one seat closer to smaller class size for our students. We are working in coordination with our partners in labor at the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). The data shows smaller class sizes are critical to student success—but achieving them requires sustained investment, strategic execution, and continued collaboration across all levels of government. With the right resources and flexibility, we are confident in our ability to deliver the high-quality learning environments New York City students deserve. We are committed to this work and look forward to sharing more with the Council in the coming months.

But let us not only focus on our new buildings- projects in our existing buildings actually make up the majority of our work. With a portfolio whose buildings' average age is 70 years old and with 200 buildings over 100 years old, there is never a shortage of work to be done to keep our buildings safe, watertight, and modern.

In this Proposed Amendment, we have allocated $7.95 billion for work in our existing buildings through the Capital Investment Category.

The Capital Investment category of the Plan is divided into two primary programs: the Capital Improvement Program, or CIP, totaling $3.43 billion, and School Enhancement projects totaling $2.91 billion. Together, these investments support our continued commitment to maintaining safe, modern, and inspiring school facilities for students across the city. Through this work, we expand and modernize critical spaces within our buildings helping ensure that our facilities support equity and excellence.

The Capital Improvement Program focuses on essential upgrades and major repairs that keep our buildings safe and functioning at the highest standards. These projects include both exterior and interior building work, addressing life safety and security systems as well as key structural elements such as roofs, parapets, and windows. Maintaining this infrastructure is vital to protecting the safety and well-being of the students, staff, and communities who rely on our school facilities every day. In the current Plan to date, we have awarded 156 projects under the CIP umbrella focusing mostly on exterior modernizations totaling roughly $1.1 billion.

The School Enhancement program totals $2.91 billion and is designed to strengthen educational opportunities and improve the day-to-day learning experience for students. These investments support school technology upgrades with data and bandwidth enhancements, the realignment of existing facilities to better meet instructional needs, bathroom renovations, science lab improvements, and programs such as Innovative, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible Spaces (IDEAS) and Career Connected Learning (CCL).

One of our biggest priorities in the past several Plans has been to increase the accessibility of our existing schools. I know this has been a top priority for the Council for many years as well, and we appreciate your advocacy and partnership in this key area. This plan allocates $800 million towards making our buildings accessible to school communities.

As an example of our progress, together, NYCPS and the SCA undertook a Full Program Accessibility project at P.S. 236 in Brooklyn, which also houses a D75 school. This project was completed in June 2025. Thanks to this work, the Building Accessibility Profile rating changed from "not accessible" to "fully accessible." Some of our work in this comprehensive project includes the provision of accessible entrances, ramps, lifts, an elevator, student-accessible restrooms, and a fire alarm system equipped with strobe lighting, altogether improving safety and inclusivity for all occupants.

For the FY2025-29 Capital Plan, we will build on the success of the previous plan, continuing our focus on city-wide equity. In collaboration with our advocate partners and other stakeholders, we have established new city-wide goals. We will prioritize projects that increase the accessibility of all primary buildings across every school district, raising the accessibility threshold from 33 percent to 40 percent. Additionally, NYCPS will focus on improving accessibility in District 75 across the entire city, aiming to ensure that 75 percent of those buildings are at least partially accessible, with 50 percent fully accessible. We anticipate that our efforts to achieve our goals will improve accessibility in over 60 school buildings, further advancing our commitment to progress and growth.

As you know, in the FY25-29 Plan, we created a category called Healthy Schools which focuses efforts and funding on the health and wellbeing of our students, our buildings, and in turn, our city. Most of the $2.32 billion allocated for the Healthy Schools category is for electrification. In this Plan, we have $1.4 billion allocated to electrify existing school buildings and convert them to all-electric heating.

This extensive work involves replacing fossil fuel burning boilers with high efficiency, all-electric heat pumps that provide ventilation, cooling and heating for the entire school – including their kitchens, cafeterias, auditoriums, and gymnasiums. Buildings account for nearly 70% of the city's greenhouse gas emissions. With over 1,500 school buildings in our portfolio, our work represents a significant portion of the city's efforts to reduce our carbon footprint and combat climate change.

Since the Electrification program was initiated, we have 18 school electrification projects in construction with more in the pipeline. Combining Plan funding and additional funding from DCAS, we aim to fund over 30 more electrification projects in this Plan. We're also continuing to explore ways to reduce our reliance on the electrical grid with renewable sources such as geothermal and solar, in addition to researching innovative solutions that extract heat from thermal sources.

$390 million is dedicated under the Healthy Schools category to physical education facilities and reflects our commitment to ensuring that every student has access to safe, modern spaces, including gyms, playgrounds, athletic fields, and swimming pools that support healthy lifestyles, teamwork, and joy in movement, while fostering stronger school communities and more vibrant neighborhood spaces. These investments not only enhance the student experience during the school day, but also create welcoming, shared assets that communities can take pride in beyond school hours.

Also in this category, there is $150 million for the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience which is intended to improve the overall atmosphere, functionality, and student experience in school cafeterias. It focuses on creating welcoming, student-centered dining spaces through upgraded equipment, improved layout and flow, visual enhancements, and supports that encourage healthier choices and smoother meal service. The goal is to make cafeterias more engaging, efficient, and align with NYCPS's commitment to nourishing students in a positive environment. Since the inception of this initiative, we have completed 295 sites with 50 additional sites to be completed by the end of August.

Lastly, in this Proposed Amendment, we have allocated $3.72 billion in our Mandated category to meet code, agency, remediation, and other requirements of local law or City agency mandates. It also includes funding for wrap-up insurance for contractors on our projects as well as prior plan completion funding to finish the projects that started in the previous Plan.

As I close, I want to thank the Council for their long-standing partnership to our schools, which is evident not just through your advocacy but in the funding that is currently in our Plan through Reso A allocations. These are important projects for our schools and the community, and we thank you for your continued support.

I would like to leave you with images of a few of the buildings we will be opening in September bringing more capacity to these neighborhoods and furthering our work to comply with class size.

- An addition at P.S. 95 in Jamaica, Queens
- I.S. @ 4012 Fort Hamilton Parkway in Borough Park, Brooklyn
- P.S. @ 46-10 70th Street in Woodside, Queens
- An addition at P.S.116 in Jamaica, Queens
- An addition at I.S. 216 in Fresh Meadows, Queens
- A middle school that is serving as an annex and feeder school for John Dewey High School in Gravesend, Brooklyn

We look forward to celebrating the opening of these buildings and all of the over 4,600 seats we are opening this September with you, the schools, and all of our partners. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today, and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER

Testimony Before the Education Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 23, 2026

Madison Mounty
Director, Government Relations and Advocacy

Good afternoon, Speaker Menin, Education Chair Dinowitz, Finance Chair Lee, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Madison Mounty, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations and Advocacy at the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Simon Wiesenthal Center is a nearly 50 year old Jewish Human Rights organization that works to combat antisemitism, hate and bias in all forms and promote tolerance through education, advocacy, and storytelling.

New York City stands at a pivotal educational moment: rising hate incidents, the fading presence of survivor testimony, and increasing historical misinformation converge to create an urgent need for media literacy. That's where our programs come in.

Our current city council supported workshop, *Combatting Hate in Digital Spaces,* is a learning experience designed for Middle and High School students. Learners explore the formation of online identities and examine how digital systems such as AI and the algorithm influence and manipulate individual actions in digital spaces. With a focus on digital identity and civic responsibility, this workshop supports student reflection on how their digital selves are shaped, as well as the responsibilities and real-world consequences that accompany their online presence.

Funding for FY25 was used to deliver a total of 463 workshops and assemblies to over 11,000 public middle and high school students in 47 schools across the five boroughs. We are continuing to work in partnership with schools in 12 council districts to schedule these workshops and assemblies for the current fiscal year.

Our new initiative request, Witness to History is a workshop for students in grades 9–12 that uses survivor testimony from the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide to teach how history is created, remembered, and communicated. Research in genocide and human rights education shows that testimony-based learning is among the most effective ways to reduce dehumanization and build lasting ethical awareness. Witness to History responds by pairing empathy grounded in real human voices with media literacy and civic responsibility, helping students understand not only what happened but also how history is constructed, remembered, and carried forward.

An enhanced restoration of funding through the Speaker's Initiative, renewed and enhanced funding through Citywide Initiatives, as well as youth and local discretionary funding at the levels requested in our applications will allow us to provide workshop sessions for as many as 14,000 students and expand to schools and communities beyond our current reach. We look

SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER

forward to our continued partnership with the City Council and growing our reach to an even greater number of schools and districts across New York City.

Thank you for your consideration and we hope to have your support.

Good Afternoon Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, thank you for your service, and for all you have done to support Food & Nutrition Education throughout NYC.

My name is Danielle Cohen and I am the Founder & Executive Director of SNACC (Sustainable Nutrition and Community Connection). SNACC is a NYC-based nonprofit that provides hands-on food education paired with consistent food access to youth and families across the city. We serve over 1,700 students annually on a recurring basis, across 32 zip codes, primarily in under-resourced communities, through both in-school and after-school programming. Our work is grounded in the belief that food education must be practical, consistent, engaging, and paired with access to drive meaningful behavior change, improve health outcomes, and strengthen families.

Food education is not just about nutrition-it is a critical lever for academic success and overall well-being. When students have the skills, confidence, and access to approach food with a deeper understanding of how to fuel their bodies, we see measurable improvements in social and academic outcomes. This work builds practical life skills while also addressing food insecurity in a way that is immediate, empowering, and sustainable.

SNACC is a proud member of the Food Education Coalition and has benefited greatly from the leadership and coordination of the Tisch Food Center. Through this network, we have been able to collaborate with peer organizations, share best practices, and align around a broader vision for equitable access to food education across NYC. The Coalition has also played a critical role in connecting us with school partners and securing food education funding that makes this work possible-our impact would not be nearly as far-reaching without this support.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being, and health of communities throughout New York City. We urge the council to strengthen Food and Nutrition Education in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub.

As an organization delivering programming across multiple schools and communities, we have directly experienced the value of the Food Ed Hub as a centralized space for coordination, resources, and connection. It strengthens the ecosystem by reducing duplication, supporting alignment, and ensuring that providers like SNACC can deliver higher-quality, more consistent programming.

Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's most vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households. We also implore the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYC Public Schools.

SNACC has seen firsthand the demand from schools for this type of programming, and the barriers that exist due to limited funding. Through partnerships with NYC public schools, we deliver hands-on food education that builds confidence, life skills, and healthier habits- but far too many schools are unable to access these opportunities and the ones that do have it, heavily rely on the Food Ed. Grants to make it possible. Increased grant funding would allow more schools to bring in trusted providers and ensure that students across the city benefit from consistent, high-quality programming.

Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Additional resources will help expand programming to more schools each year, benefiting students and their communities while also supporting educators with meaningful, applied learning tools.

With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is critical to ensure that this work not only continues, but grows to meet rising needs. We are seeing increasing levels of food insecurity across the communities we serve, alongside rising food costs, making this work more urgent than ever.

Finally, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers. While SNACC's primary focus is education, our work is deeply connected to the broader school food system. When school kitchens are adequately staffed and supported, it creates stronger alignment between what students learn and what they experience in their daily meals. Adequate staffing, livable wages, and professional development opportunities are essential to ensuring that school meals are nutritious, appealing, and effectively integrated into the broader educational experience.

A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce would help strengthen this system by evaluating career pathways, wages, staffing ratios, and training opportunities.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to improving the health and well-being of New York City's students and families.

St.Nicks Alliance

Where Opportunity Grows

Testimony of St. Nicks Alliance
Before the New York City Council

FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Education
Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair

Submitted by Michael Smith
March 23, 2026

Chair Eric Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today and for your exceptional support of NYC students.

My name is Michael Smith, and I am the Deputy Director of Youth and Education for St. Nicks Alliance. As a settlement house, each year St. Nicks Alliance provides education and youth services to more than 8,700 2-21 year olds. We help children and youth advance through the stages of education with the goal of transitioning into productive lives with the social, emotional and academic skills necessary to thrive.

Critical to this goal are St. Nicks Alliance's Small World early childhood center, Learning to Work at Bushwick Community High School and 9 Summer Rising camps. These models bring evidence-based, holistic and culturally responsive education to our community's youngest or most struggling children. This work is not possible without adequate resources.

Our testimony will focus on recommendations to support crucial education programs, and preserve access to care for families across the city, including:

- Early Childhood Education
- Restore and baseline $31 million for Learning to Work programs
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth.

Strengthen the Early Childhood Education Workforce

For community-based providers, hiring and retaining early childhood staff is extremely difficult due to low salaries, which are a direct result of inadequate contract values set by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and ratified by DC37's Local 95 and Local 205 contracts. Center-based providers such as Small World can not afford to offer salary parity with similar positions working directly at the DOE. As a result, center-based providers face high vacancy

rates and staff shortages, preventing them from running at full capacity due to Article 47 child-to-adult ratios. This year Small World was forced to close three classrooms–a third of our capacity–due to inadequate staffing. These closures occurred despite receiving up to four applications for each DOE-contracted 3K and UPK seat. Furthermore, high staff turnover rates destabilize home-school partnerships and the continuity of care that are so critical for young children's behavioral and cognitive development.

At its core, the Early Childhood Ecosystem needs more educators–at least 1 per 6 children– in order to achieve universal childcare and meet families' needs. To get there, NYC must pay significantly increased wages in order to retain and attract talent. Early childhood educators, who are predominantly women of color, should not be in the bottom 4% of wage earners in our state. This shameful truth is a women's issue, a racial equity issue and a social justice issue.

Beyond an essential investment to achieve thriving wages, early childhood educators also need an investment in their professional development so they are well-trained, supported, and equipped to meet the developmental needs of young children. High-quality programs require ongoing training, coaching, and clear career pathways.

Paying Providers the Real Cost of Operating ECE Centers

Achieving New York City's historic expansion of Early Childhood Education requires paying providers the real costs of operating early childhood centers and educating our city's youngest residents.

First, the **Birth to Five contract must be overhauled**. The current enrollment-based model is highly defective with no guaranteed payment of the real fixed costs for operating centers such as rent, insurance and Article 47 safety regulations that do not change based on enrollment. This funding model also ignores that center-based providers have little control over enrollment, as the system is centralized under DOE. The Birth to Five contract also has no cost escalators, fully burdening CBO providers with inflationary costs. As a result, once financially stable centers are rapidly accruing debt. Small World accrued a $100,000 deficit last year, which will grow to nearly $250,000 this year. This is simply not sustainable. As with our other DOE contracts, such as community schools, DOE should reimburse up to the full value of the contract, regardless of enrollment.

Second, NYCPS must **prevent late and inconsistent payments** which create significant challenges for providers operating on extremely thin margins. The contracting and payment processes at DOE have long been filled with delays and confusion, particularly around budget approvals, enrollment management, and invoice submissions. Providers are often unable to invoice for services because student rosters have not been approved, and even when invoices are submitted, payments are frequently delayed beyond 30 days. A recent United Neighborhood Houses brief explored these challenges, with some settlement houses–including St. Nicks Alliance – reporting that it has taken nearly a full fiscal year to be paid for services already delivered. In the absence of timely payment, St. Nick's Alliance and other providers are forced to take on lines of credit–and the burdensome associated and unreimbursed costs–simply to make payroll and keep classrooms open.

Third, New York City must **dedicate capital funding to repair and upgrade existing facilities** so they can continue serving young children and families safely and effectively. Small World, for example, is set to add two classrooms and replace its HVAC system with generous support from City Council and NYS–but larger investments are needed to fully implement necessary upgrades.

New York City cannot build a universal system that meets families' child care needs without resolving the Birth to Five contract, ensuring community-based organizations are fully and promptly paid for delivering essential services, and investing in the spaces in which children are educated.

Last, the Early Childhood Ecosystem needs **adequate staffing of its two regulated by two agencies:** New York City Department of Education (DOE) and New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Their staff must also work closely together to ensure that permits, inspections, staff clearances, and background checks are processed in a timely and coordinated manner. Delays in these processes prevent classrooms from opening, disrupt services, and create uncertainty for families and providers alike. A streamlined and collaborative approach across agencies is essential to avoid interruptions in care and to guarantee continuity of services as the system grows.

Invest in Learning to Work

St. Nicks Alliance operates on Learning to Work program at Bushwick Community High School. The Learning to Work (LTW) model supports students in Transfer Schools, such as BCHS, and Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs) as they work toward their high school diplomas and develop post-secondary plans. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are embedded in these schools through LTW contracts with the DOE. In the current school year, Learning to Work programs are available citywide in 46 Transfer Schools and 20 YABCs, with settlement houses operating 27 of these contracts.

Although the FY26 Adopted Budget restored funding for LTW programs through June 2026, this long-standing program was not baselined. To ensure future stability, the City must restore $31 million for LTW and baseline the full cost of the program.

Currently, LTW funding is not sufficient to deliver services effectively, which have been eroded over the last ten years due to flat funding and rising costs. At St. Nicks Alliance, we now have half the staff and half the internship hours we need, as contracts were originally written when the minimum wage was $9, and staffing has been reduced incrementally—from 5, to 4, to 3 staff—to cover rising costs. The new RFP makes this situation even worse–BCHS will have a 7% cut for non-internship expenses from current levels set in 2015. In real dollars, it's a 35% cut based on inflation.

Adequate funding is needed to restore staffing levels, expand internship hours, and allow LTW interns to work up to 20 hours per week, so students can contribute meaningfully to their family incomes. We also encourage the City to establish a baseline budget for FY27 to ensure continuity of services during this interim period. Finally, the contract registration process should be streamlined and shortened, enabling community-based organizations to receive timely payments and remain financially stable while providing high-quality opportunities for students.

In addition to funding, there are opportunities to strengthen the RFP to better support students:

- The proposed **caseload of 1 Advocate Counselor for 75 students** may make it difficult to provide the individualized support that many students need, as current ratios average 1:50.
- **Advocate Counselor responsibilities have shifted** from primarily emotional and mental health support to include post-secondary and vocational guidance. Strong relationships between counselors and students are essential to guide high-risk students through graduation.
- While the RFP emphasizes **post-secondary planning and work-based learning experiences**, there is an opportunity to address the growing **mental health and basic needs** of students, which are critical to their success.
- While providing internships and work-based learning opportunities is within the purview of CBOs, the **funding for student stipends will be funneled through a DOE centralized system**, adding steps that may impact support for students, including undocumented students and those attending transfer schools and YABCs.

By addressing these funding and structural considerations collaboratively, LTW can continue to provide meaningful opportunities and comprehensive support for students while enabling community-based organizations to operate effectively.

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

St. Nicks Alliance operates 9 Summer Rising sites serving more than 1250 K-8 students. Although the FY27 Preliminary Budget has restored funding for summer programming, there is still more work that must be done to prepare for Summer 2026. In addition to tackling the operational issues that have plagued Summer Rising year after year, the City must work with local stakeholders to pilot summer program models other than Summer Rising. The Summer Rising model made sense when it was first created in Summer 2021, when students had been learning remotely for long periods of time during the COVID-19 pandemic and there were real concerns about learning loss and student readiness to return to school buildings long-term. However, we are now in a different time, and summer 2026 presents us with an exciting opportunity to begin to rethink and reshape summer programming to meet students' current needs.

In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this program, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released *One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families*. Some of our key findings were:

- Many families are dependent on free summer programming provided by the city. 58% of surveyed parents said they did not have a back-up option if Summer Rising was not available, with the percentage rising to 64% for low-income families.
- Middle schoolers expressed frustration with the DOE-led academics. 87% of focus group participants disagreed or felt neutral in regards to the statement "I feel engaged in the morning session" of Summer Rising."

- Despite recognizing the value of summer academic enrichment, many parents participating in the survey expressed frustration over a lack of communication around the DOE-led academic program. Parents reported being unclear about what curriculum was being used, who their students' teachers were, and if their child's learning needs were being met. This was in contrast to reports of regular communication from the CBO staff.
- There are widespread concerns whether students with IEPs and English Language Learners are receiving appropriate accommodations. Over half of CBO staff said that a shortage of paraprofessional support for students with IEPs was one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, some focus group participants who identify as English Language Learners shared that they were excluded from the DOE-led academic portion and given arts & crafts projects instead.

Last year, the Department of Education released the Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis, which used spring 2024 and fall 2024 standardized academic data to compare the academic performance of young people who participated in Summer Rising to those who did not participate in the program. From this data, we can see that middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days saw no statistically significant impact on their Math scores. Furthermore, when compared to other students in the City, middle school Summer Rising participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days actually fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group. DOE's own impact analysis supports our findings that Summer Rising is not the appropriate model for all middle school youth.

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child's preference, but most low-income families are reliant on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement.

There exist a number of respected summer programming models that be used as a basis for alternative models, including:

- COMPASS Summer: DYCD funds community-based and Cornerstone programs to operate non-Summer Rising programming during summer months. St. Nicks Alliance operates three of these programs. This model reflects school-year programming and includes field trips, physical activity, leadership development, and integrated academics.
- Freedom Schools: This research-based and culturally sensitive program focuses on academics, civic engagement, family engagement, and social emotional learning. The training and model have been developed by the Children's Defense Fund.

In conclusion, investing in early childhood education, adequately funding Learning to Work, and piloting innovative summer programs are critical to ensuring all NYC students have the support, skills, and opportunities they need to thrive. We urge the Committee to consider these recommendations to strengthen equity, continuity, and quality across the city's education system.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at msmith@stnicksalliance.org

Written Testimony to the New York City Council

Education Committee Hearing

March 20, 2026

To the esteemed members of the New York City Council,

My name is Amy Jones, and I proudly serve as a Regional Board Co-Chair for Teach For America New York. I bring to this testimony more than two decades of experience in New York City public education — as a 1997 Teach For America Corps Member who began my career teaching in NYC classrooms, and subsequently as a middle school principal in the Bronx, a Deputy Network Leader overseeing approximately 30 schools, and a Deputy Cluster Leader overseeing approximately 300 schools. I also served as the Chief Academic Officer and Deputy Head of Special Education for the New York City Schools. I have seen firsthand, at every level of our system, what it takes to prepare and support teachers who truly move the needle for students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on a critical issue for our city: ensuring a strong pipeline of well-prepared teachers for our students.

For over 35 years, Teach For America New York (TFA NY) has recruited and developed leaders to serve in high-need schools across New York City. While we have seen progress, significant challenges remain. One in four children in NYC lives in poverty, and schools are facing a growing teacher shortage. Following pandemic-related attrition and new class size mandates, the city is projected to need approximately 18,000 new teachers over the next five years.

TFA NY is working to meet this moment by strengthening our teacher training and support model. Through rigorous pre-service training and ongoing coaching, we equip corps members with the skills to deliver strong academic outcomes from their first day in the classroom. Our teachers engage in continuous goal-setting, observation, and feedback cycles, with at least 80 percent on track to meet or exceed their classroom academic goals each year. As a principal, my school had the second highest student growth rate in the city, thanks in no small part to my team of TFA teachers.

At the same time, we are expanding the teacher pipeline. In contrast to national declines, TFA NY has grown its corps by 25 percent over the past two years. This year alone, we increased from 377 to 435 teachers, reaching approximately 28,000 students. We aim to continue this growth, bringing in up to 500 new teachers annually in the coming years.

Our focus is not only on scale, but on impact. As part of our 2030 goal, we are working to double 8th-grade math outcomes in five districts across the Bronx and Brooklyn. Strong teacher preparation — grounded in content expertise, data-driven instruction, and high expectations — is essential to achieving this goal.

As the City Council considers solutions to address teacher shortages and improve student outcomes, we urge continued investment in high-quality teacher training and support. Ensuring that every classroom is led by a well-prepared, well-supported educator is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for students.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to New York's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Jones
Regional Board Co-Chair, Teach For America New York
Former CAO & Deputy Head of Special Education, NYC Public Schools

Written Testimony to the New York City Council

Education Committee Hearing

March 23, 2026

To the esteemed members of the New York City Council—

My name is Mike Henry, I live in Manhattan and serve as a Regional Board Member for Teach For America New York. **Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the urgent need to strengthen our teacher pipeline.**

For over 35 years, Teach for America has recruited and developed educators for high-need schools across the city. Yet significant challenges remain: one in four NYC children lives in poverty, and the city is projected to need roughly 18,000 new teachers over the next five years due to pandemic-related attrition and new class size mandates.

In response, TFA NY is strengthening teacher preparation through rigorous training and ongoing coaching, with over 80% of our teachers meeting or exceeding academic goals each year. At the same time, we are expanding the pipeline—growing our corps of new teachers by 25% in the past two years and reaching 28,000 students this year alone.

Looking ahead, we aim to scale to 500 new teachers annually while improving outcomes, including doubling 8th-grade math performance in targeted Bronx and Brooklyn districts by 2030.

We urge continued investment in high-quality teacher training and support to ensure every student has access to a well-prepared educator.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to New York's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Henry

Regional Board Member
Teach For America New York

TO: New York City Council Education Committee
FROM: Teach For America New York
RE: Written Testimony

March 23, 2026

To the esteemed members of the New York City Council Education Committee:

My name is Tia Morris and I serve as the Executive Director of Teach For America New York (TFANY). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on a critical issue for our state: building and sustaining a strong, well-prepared teacher workforce for our students.

As a longtime educator, having started my career as a classroom teacher in Harlem as a 1998 Teach For America corps member, I deeply understand the challenges and opportunities related to the teaching talent pipeline.While there have been major shifts in the sector over the last three decades, one thing remains clear: our students deserve the opportunity to live choice-filled lives and there is no way that is possible without strong educators supporting them along the way.

For more than 35 years, Teach For America New York has partnered with schools and communities to recruit, develop, and support educators serving in high-need classrooms across New York City. The challenges that families and educators face are real and systemic. In many of the communities where TFANY works, up to 90% of students are living in poverty. We know that issues such as this deeply impact a child's ability to learn and educators continue to be on the front lines of supporting children to mitigate some of these challenges.

However, schools are facing a growing teacher shortage. Pandemic-era attrition saw the exodus of thousands of teachers across the country- and NYC was no different. Now, with new state-mandated class size limits, the city is projected to need tens of thousands of new teachers over the coming years and teaching colleges are simply falling short of providing the volume necessary to meet the need.

But there is hope. Alternate route programs, such as Teach For America, are stepping up to help fill that gap. In contrast to national trends, we are expanding the pipeline of educators entering the profession.

TFA New York has grown its corps by 25 percent over the past two years and 60% over the last four years. In 2022, we had a full teaching corps of 277 first and second year teachers. However, this year, we brought in 265 first year teachers alone, for a total teaching corps of 435 teachers- up from 377 last school year. In the fall of 2026, we will bring in roughly 300 corps members, fueling a teaching corps of over 500 teachers.

We aim to sustain this growth, with plans to expand to a teaching corps of 1,000- bringing in up to 500 new first-year teachers annually in the coming years.

In response, TFA New York has strengthened and scaled our teacher training program to meet this need. Through rigorous pre-service training and ongoing, individualized coaching, we prepare corps members to deliver strong academic outcomes from their first day in the classroom. Our model emphasizes data-driven instruction, strong classroom culture, and ambitious goal-setting. In fact, over 90% of principals who hire TFA teachers report deep satisfaction and plan to hire our teachers in subsequent years.

At the same time, our work is grounded in a clear focus on student outcomes. We are deeply committed to the economic mobility of students, so have been a staunch advocate of math achievement- working in coalitions to help lead the way to fight for NYC Solves. And while curriculum is an important first step, achieving this goal requires not only more teachers, but highly effective ones who are deeply trained, well-supported, and equipped to meet the needs of their students.

As the city considers how best to address teacher shortages and improve student achievement, we urge continued investment in high-quality teacher preparation and support. Strengthening the educator pipeline is essential to ensuring that every student, irrespective of zip code or demography, has access to an excellent education.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to students and families. Teach For America New York stands ready to continue partnering to advance educational opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

Tia Morris
Executive Director
Teach For America New York

Arab American Family Support Center

150 Court Street, 3rd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
Tel: (718) 643-8000 | Fax: (718) 797-0410
Web: aafscny.org

Serving all five boroughs of NYC

TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
March 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Paul McKenney, and I am the Associate Director of Readiness Initiatives at the Arab-American Family Support Center, known as AAFSC.

AAFSC serves roughly 20,000 New Yorkers each year, and our staff speaks more than 20 languages. Over 70 percent of our clients were born outside the United States, many from historically underserved communities. Our work centers on families by helping them stabilize during challenging times, maintain stability, and ultimately thrive.

Today, I want to highlight three initiatives that are critical to supporting the educational endeavors of immigrant New Yorkers of all ages.

First, AAFSC is proud to be a recipient of City's First Readers funding. Alongside 16 nonprofit partners, this initiative helps ensure that New York City children from birth to age five receive the early literacy support they need to succeed in school and in life. Each year, City's First Readers reaches nearly one million children, caregivers, educators, and early childhood providers with research-based programming during the most critical years of brain development.

Through this initiative, AAFSC operates our Caregiver-Child Bonding Circle, a linguistically accessible parenting support program for caregivers and children ages 0 to 3. Offered in Arabic and Bangla, the program runs for multiple 10 to 12 week cycles each year and focuses on play-based learning, early talk strategies, and strengthening caregiver-child relationships to support cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The caregivers we serve are primarily low-income immigrant Arab and South Asian women who face significant barriers, with the majority living below the poverty line. Many have limited formal education, and most are not employed outside the home. For many participants, the bonding circles also serve as a critical peer support network that reduces isolation and helps caregivers navigate parenting in a new country.

Also critical to our community is our Young Adult and Youth Program, which served 220 immigrant and refugee youth, ages 10 to 24, in 2025. At a time when many young people in our communities face immigration-related trauma, rising hate incidents, and the impact of global conflicts, this program provides a safe and supportive space for youth to grow and thrive. Through academic support, career guidance, mentorship, civic engagement, and mental health resources, we help young people build leadership skills while strengthening cultural identity and resilience.

We are also proud recipients of Adult Literacy Forward initiative funding and a member of the New York Coalition for Adult Literacy. Through this work, AAFSC supports hundreds of new arrivals learn English and navigate life in their new city.

There are more than 2.2 million adults in New York City who have limited English proficiency or do not have a high school diploma, and 1.7 million of them are immigrants. Our free daily classes help students build English speaking and literacy skills that allow them to find jobs and apartments, go to the doctor, and speak with their child's teacher. Our curriculum focuses on practical language skills that support employment, civic participation, and access to essential services.

The program offers courses in three areas: Basic Literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Civics. Staff create and adapt our curriculum collaboratively in response to student needs and demographic changes year to year. Our classes are grounded in real-life situations to prepare our clients for navigating a new city and unfamiliar systems. We focus on survival English, building literacy skills for people who may not have had formal education as children. We are well equipped and experienced in supporting students of all literacy levels, including those with no literacy in their native languages, meeting individuals where they are and working closely with each student to develop their individual goals.

Our instructors work closely with students to prepare them for the workforce, developing curriculum units specifically focused on workplace English in environments like food service, retail, healthcare, and building maintenance. We also provide resume support and job readiness skills. Additionally, we've integrated digital literacy components into our ESOL instruction, recognizing that access to technology and digital skills are increasingly essential for navigating daily life, employment, and civic participation — though this remains challenging as many students lack reliable devices or consistent access.

In the current climate of heightened anti-immigrant enforcement and restrictive policies, our Adult Education and Literacy program serves as a gateway to AAFSC's comprehensive services. Students and their family members gain access to youth leadership programs, health insurance and SNAP enrollment, legal services, emergency financial assistance, food and resource distribution, housing navigation, domestic violence case management, mental health counseling, and parenting support.

To continue meeting growing demand, we respectfully request:

- $10 million for the City's First Readers initiative.
- $70,000 in discretionary funding through City's First Readers for AAFSC's Caregiver-Child Bonding Circle to sustain and expand culturally responsive services for immigrant families.
- $100,000 in discretionary funding for our Young Adult and Youth Program and $75,000 for our Young Women Leadership program.
- An increase in Council discretionary funding for adult literacy from $14.5 million to $18 million, and the consolidation of all Council adult literacy funding under Adult Literacy Forward.
- $325,000 in discretionary funding through Adult Literacy Forward for AAFSC's Adult Education and Literacy Program.

Continued Council investment ensures that New Yorkers of all ages, regardless of language, background, or zip code, can learn, grow, and thrive. As immigrants are under attack, these services are vital to their safety.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to an educated and prosperous New York City.

TESTIMONY of The Integration Coalition
Facilitated by New York Appleseed

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
March 23rd, 2026

My name is Nyah Berg, and I am the Executive Director of New York Appleseed, a nonprofit that advocates for inclusive and integrated schools and communities. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Integration Coalition, a coalition of organizations and advocates convened by Appleseed to address school segregation through a Real Integration framework and call for a model of solidarity, not scarcity, across NYC public schools.

I am here today to call attention to a critical gap in the proposed education budget: the lack of dedicated investments to advance school integration and inclusion across NYCPS, despite renewed commitments by both the Chancellor and the Mayor to address segregation in New York City's school system.

Specifically, we are calling for the following:

- **Baseline funding of $2 million annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 and continuing for three years, to support implementation of laws passed by the council in 2019, bolstering integration planning and initiatives.**

We are also in full support of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July – Learning to Work ($31M); Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) ($12M); infant/toddler child care seats ($10M); restorative justice ($6M); the Mental Health Continuum ($5M); early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M), as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

The importance of dedicating funding to tools that support the implementation and evaluation of school integration and inclusion efforts at NYCPS cannot be overstated. There is a track record of success for diversity and integration planning initiatives that have had access to state or city funding to support community engagement, planning, and implementation. Examples such as the successful merger process of **Arts and Letters 305 United, District 13's larger diversity efforts**, and the continued measured success of the **District 15 Diversity Plan** demonstrate what is possible when communities work intentionally toward integration, and even more so, what is possible when they have the funding to do so.

In all of those examples, school districts had either received a city diversity grant awarded in 2019, or a New York State Integration Project (NYSIP) grant – both funding streams have since ended. As the federal government has also halted funding for diversity initiatives,

such as its short-lived Fostering Diverse Schools grant, and with magnet school funding already under threat, New York City needs to renew its own funding to support integration initiatives.

The City Council has historically been a crucial partner in advancing integration. In 2015, the Council passed the School Diversity Accountability Act, which created one of the most comprehensive datasets on school demographics to date. Nearly ten years later, we now have a body of data with the potential power to hold the NYCPS accountable for progress toward diversity goals. Further, in 2019, the New York City Council passed two local laws (244 & 225): one establishing a permanent School Diversity Advisory Working Group that would hold annual hearings and report on its recommendations, and the other requiring every community school district to have a diversity working group. These laws showcased the City Council's sense of urgency and commitment to addressing the longstanding segregation present in NYC public schools. These laws also have one common theme: stagnation. All three laws, in some form, have stagnated in their potential to advance an agenda to address segregation, whether due to a lack of follow-up or follow-through.

With the Mayor and the Chancellor expressing willingness and understanding to support remedies for historic school segregation, the City Council has a continued role in renewing forgotten and unfunded mandates, with the proper funding and urgency to make them happen. **A $2 million annual investment is a modest but essential step to operationalize these laws, turning existing mandates and data into real, community-driven integration plans and programming across the system.**

In addition to our call for funding to advance integration, we also highlight a longstanding and urgent need to make our schools truly inclusive. That is why we echo the budgetary ask of Advocates for Children of New York **to invest an additional $450 million for school accessibility projects in the 2025-2029 Capital Plan, increasing capital funding for the School Construction Authority to increase the number of accessible schools and accelerate the timeline of completion.** Too many public schools remain physically inaccessible, effectively segregating students with disabilities. Currently, only about one-third of schools are fully accessible. Even with an additional $450 million investment in school accessibility projects in the 2025–2029 Capital Plan, we would still fall well short of full accessibility by 2030.[1]

This $450 million is not a nonessential request; it is a necessity if we are serious about shortening a timeline that continues to limit school options for students with disabilities simply because they cannot physically access them. For this coalition, the connection is clear: our schools cannot be truly integrated if they are not also truly inclusive.

Thank you for your time and for your continued partnership in advancing integrated and inclusive schools across New York City. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at nberg@nyappleseed.org.

[1] https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2027/

TESTIMONY
The Legal Aid Society
to
The New York City Council
Committee on Education

Oversight:

March 23, 2026

Prepared by:

Melinda Andra, Esq.
Attorney in Charge
Education Advocacy Project
Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Practice
40 Worth St.
New York, NY 10013

Introduction

The Legal Aid Society welcomes the opportunity to testify and thanks Chairperson Dinowitz and the Committee on Education for their leadership on the effects of the 2027 budget on New York City Public School students.

In Fiscal Year 2026, New York City made significant investments to preserve education programs that were at risk of elimination due to expiring funding. The Legal Aid Society is pleased that the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget baselines funding for two of these essential initiatives—preschool special education services and Summer Rising. These services are vital to the wellbeing of children and families and represent critical commitments to equity, early intervention, and year round learning opportunities.

However, the Preliminary Budget omits funding for several critical education programs that young people urgently need. We are deeply opposed to any cuts to our public education system. In particular, we urge the Mayor and the City Council to restore and include funding for the following essential initiatives:

- **School transportation for children in foster care — $3 million**
- **Restorative Justice Programs — $21 million**
- **Literacy Initiatives — $7 million**
- **Baseline funding for the Mental Health Continuum — $5 million**

These programs are not optional; they are foundational supports that keep students safe, engaged, and on a path toward academic and life success. Restoring and baselining this funding is an investment in the wellbeing of New York City's children and the long term health of our communities.

The Legal Aid Society

The Legal Aid Society is the nation's largest and oldest provider of legal services to low-income families and individuals. Throughout our 149-year history, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. The Legal Aid Society is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. From offices in all five boroughs, the Society annually provides legal assistance to low-income families and individuals in nearly 200,000 legal matters each year, including education advocacy for school-age children and youth. We seek to be a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected -regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. Our practice encompasses three practice areas: the Criminal Defense Practice, the Civil Practice and the Juvenile Rights Practice.

The Criminal Defense Practice is the premier public defender program in the country, handling 125,000 criminal matters in a typical year. Our victories in and out of the courtroom protect the constitutional rights of our clients and strive for greater humanity in the criminal legal system. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court are school-age teenagers and young adults who need and are legally entitled to receive educational services and many of them are young parents with children who also require educational services.

The Civil Practice provides specialized, comprehensive, legal assistance across a range of civil legal practice areas that benefits more than 135,000 New Yorkers each year. Through our efforts, we secure essentials of life such as ensuring our clients have stable housing, family law assistance, access to health care, obtain life-changing immigration law assistance, and can

effectively care for themselves and their families. Many clients of the civil practice are parents of children who attend New York City Public Schools.

The Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear in New York City's Family Court due to involvement with the family regulation system, the juvenile legal system, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Our Juvenile Rights staff typically represents a total of more than 30,000 children each year. Our work with these most vulnerable New Yorkers keeps them safe and makes our city's families and communities stronger.

Our Civil, Juvenile Rights, and Criminal Defense Practices engage in educational advocacy for our clients, in the areas of special education, school discipline, and school placement and programming through the Education Advocacy Project in the Juvenile Rights and Criminal Defense Practices and the Education Law Project in the Civil Practice. In addition to representing these children each year in administrative hearings, appeals, and court proceedings, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients.

Our perspective comes from our daily contacts with children, youths, and their families as well as our frequent interactions with courts, social service providers, and NYC agencies, including the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Homeless Services (DHS); the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

The Education Advocacy Project and Education Law Project of The Legal Aid Society submit the instant testimony as we are generally concerned about the consequences of decreased funding for public education and the impact on our clients. Our written testimony will focus on

the need for funding for transportation for children in foster care, literacy, restorative justice, Learning to Work programs and the need for school based mental health supports.

I. Transportation for Students in Foster Care

Federal law, including the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, requires school districts and child welfare agencies to work together to maintain school stability for children in foster care and to ensure that appropriate transportation is provided. NYS Education Law § 3244, provides that the school district where the child attends school must provide transportation to and from the foster care placement and the child's school of origin. Despite these federal and state requirements, transportation remains a significant barrier to preserving school stability for students in foster care in New York City. While transportation challenges affect many New York City students, the impact is falling disproportionately on students in foster care, 55% of whom were chronically absent in the 2024-2025 school year.

NYCPS currently allows students in foster care from preschool through sixth grade to submit an Emergency Evaluation Request for yellow bus transportation. These requests typically take 10 days to process, during which children are left without any transportation and remain in limbo while eligibility is reviewed. During this period, no interim transportation is provided. NYCPS approves these requests only when a foster child can be added to an existing bus route with minimal disruption. The system will not create a new route or make significant adjustments to an existing route to meet the needs of a student in foster care. As a result, many children who are legally entitled to school stability wait weeks, or months, while waiting for a route to be identified for them.

In an effort to address ongoing transportation gaps, NYCPS now offers prepaid rideshare options when yellow bus service cannot be arranged within 10 school days. However, in order to take advantage, the child must be accompanied by an adult chaperone, which is not provided by NYCPS. The burden of providing an adult chaperone is shifted onto foster parents or foster care agencies. For many foster parents, who may be balancing fulltime employment, caring for multiple children, or managing complex family schedules, serving as a daily chaperone is simply not feasible. Foster care case planners are likewise unable to reliably accompany children to and from school, as their primary responsibilities center on ensuring child safety, managing caseloads, and meeting legal and administrative requirements. As a result, the rideshare option often becomes unusable in practice. This can result in increased pressure on families and foster care agencies to change children's schools and can destabilize foster care placements for children who are already experiencing trauma and instability.

There are viable solutions. For example, the City could:

1. **Contract with transportation providers that use vetted, trained drivers who do not require additional chaperones**, such as Kid Car, which already operates in New York City, or HopSkipDrive, which is used by districts including Los Angeles;
2. **Utilize ACS or other City owned vehicles staffed with escorts**, similar to the transportation model currently used for children placed at the Children's Center;
3. **Hire transportation aides** to accompany students using ride-share services when foster parents or caseworkers are unable to serve as chaperones; or
4. **Launch a dedicated interim transportation service** specifically for students awaiting bus route assignments, ensuring continuity of school attendance during transition periods.

These approaches would reduce the burden on foster families and agencies while aligning City practice with federal and state mandates to preserve school stability for children in foster care. We therefore implore the City Council to include sufficient funding in the budget (approximately $3 million) to ensure that the DOE provides interim transportation for students in foster care who are awaiting bus service.

II. Literacy Initiatives

It is a fundamental responsibility of our public education system to teach children how to read, yet the results of the 2025 New York State reading exams revealed that only 53% of all third to eighth grade students were proficient in reading. Less than half of Black (49%) and Latine (44%) students and 26% of students with disabilities were proficient in reading in those same grades were proficient in reading.[1]

Nationally, it is estimated that one in five children have dyslexia.[2] This startling statistic means that in New York City alone, it is estimated that nearly 200,000 children have dyslexia – many of whom remain undiagnosed. The reality is that getting diagnosed with dyslexia and receiving intervention to target dyslexia requires financial resources and advocacy. Families often have to get independent evaluations that cost thousands of dollars. Targeted reading intervention can cost hundreds of dollars per hour. Retaining private special education attorneys is an additional exorbitant cost. These barriers leave far too many children without the support they need to become proficient readers.

[1] New York State Report Card 2024-2025, New York State Education Department https://data.nysed.gov/essa.php?instid=800000081568&year=2025&createreport=1&38ELA=1

[2] Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, "What is Dyslexia?", 2022, available at https://dyslexia.yale.edu/dyslexia/what-is-dyslexia/, *citing* Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia*, 2nd edition, pp.143- 24.

NYPS is taking steps to address this issue at the lower grade levels, creating programs such as NYC Reads and Literacy Academy as well as new specialized dyslexia programs at schools in Harlem, the South Bronx, and Park Slope and Sunset Park in Brooklyn. However, this is not enough to address the needs of New York City students.

For those of us working in The Legal Aid Society's Education Advocacy Project and Education Law Project, low literacy and inadequate educational support translate into clients who are profoundly behind in reading. Many of the students we serve are teenagers reading at a first or second- grade level, leading to deep disengagement from school. That disengagement often has cascading consequences: it may contribute to a child- protective case due to chronic absenteeism, or it may lead to behaviors that result in a juvenile delinquency case.
While our advocacy can secure nonpublic school placements or compensatory education—such as individualized, evidence based tutoring—these remedies are expensive and reactive. They address problems that should have been identified and supported far earlier in a student's educational trajectory. The current system forces families and advocates to pursue high cost interventions when timely, effective literacy instruction could have prevented these crises altogether.

The cost of having an illiterate populace makes itself felt in a multitude of ways, including lost educational and economic opportunities. A citizen who cannot read and write will not be able to participate in government, pursue higher education, or even participate in most vocational programs. They may struggle to complete job applications or secure stable employment, increasing the likelihood of long term poverty. Illiteracy also heightens the risk of involvement with systems—such as the child welfare and criminal legal systems—that impose significant social and financial costs.

These consequences are already visible in New York City. According to recent NYCPS and ACS reporting, the average reading level of young people in juvenile detention is at the 12th percentile.[3] This means that children who are not taught to read are far more likely to engage in behaviors that bring them into contact with the juvenile legal system. The pattern continues into adulthood. Among 18- to 21-year-olds on Rikers Island, between 8 and 13 percent read at a high -school level,[4] and approximately 87-92% percent require academic interventions just to reach a functional level of literacy. Once young people enter the school to- prison pipeline, they require intensive, evidence- based interventions to help them exit it and to access the educational and economic opportunities that literacy makes possible. The data make clear that failing to teach children to read is not only an educational -failure, it is a driver of long term inequity and justice- system- involvement.

We urge you to maintain—and expand—funding for literacy programs for New York City students in every school and at **every** grade level, including at high schools and within the New York City public schools that serve children in juvenile detention and in city jails. Because the City's literacy initiatives to date have focused primarily on students in grades K–2, we ask the Education Committee to prioritize the development and implementation of robust programs for students in grades 3 through 12. Many of these older students did not receive evidence based reading instruction or access to the science of reading during their early elementary years. They

[3] *Educational Programming for New York City Juvenile Delinquents, Juvenile Offenders, and Adolescent Offenders, Local Law 21of 2024*, September 2025, New York City Public Schools Report. https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/local-law-21-d79---09-29-25.pdf.

[4] Rikers Island Education Report: Educational Programming for Adolescents and Young Adults at Rikers Island – Local Law 168 of 2017, November 22, 2024, p. 2. Available at https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/local-law-168-d79---11-22-24.pdf (The reported figure is variable as the report identified that approximately 8% are reading at a 9th- 10th grade level, and less than 5% are reading at an 11th -12th grade level.)

now require high quality, targeted literacy programs to build the foundational skills necessary to navigate adult life, pursue employment, and live independently.

Investing in specialized reading programs is not only the right thing to do for New York City students, it is also a fiscally responsible strategy. Early and sustained literacy support prevents the need for far more costly interventions later in a student's educational and life trajectory.

III. Restorative Justice

All students are entitled and deserve to attend schools that make them feel safe and supported. However, tens of thousands of students each year are suspended from school or removed from class—which does nothing to build or repair relationships or make schools safer and which disproportionately impact Black and Latine students, students with disabilities, and youth who are homeless or in the foster system. Exclusionary school discipline has also been linked with lower educational achievement and greater likelihood of future involvement in the juvenile or criminal legal system.

In FY 2024, $21 million was dedicated to restorative justice programs. When federal Covid funding ended, the city dedicated $12M in one year funding to save the program. We appreciate that the FY 2026 budget included an additional $12 million in city funding to help offset the loss of expiring federal stimulus dollars, but that was a substantial decrease over previous years. In addition, only $6 million of that amount was baselined, while the remaining $6 million was allocated for just one year. Restorative Justice initiatives that keep students in school support student mental health, improve school climate and improve academic achievement.

a. Restorative Justice is Critical to Foster Safe Communities.

Student mental health and behavior are deeply interconnected. Both the CDC and the U.S. Surgeon General emphasize that schools can serve as a powerful protective factor in the youth mental health crisis. Students who feel genuinely connected to their school communities report significantly lower rates of poor mental health. As we look toward 2027 and beyond, maintaining and expanding research based restorative practices is essential. These approaches strengthen school engagement, provide students with stability and access to supportive services, and help cultivate safe, inclusive learning environments.

Exclusionary discipline, by contrast, continues to harm children—especially those who are disproportionately affected, including Black and Latine students, students with disabilities, and students from low income backgrounds. Reducing reliance on punitive practices and investing in restorative, relationship centered strategies are critical to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

A 2023 report from the U.S. Surgeon General underscored the importance of strong relationships and evidence b-ased practices in schools as a protective factor against the rising levels of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection among young people. [5] Since then, the connection between students' social and emotional well-being and traditional academic outcomes has only become more widely recognized. According to the CDC, "school connectedness (i.e. the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about them as individuals) has been shown to have positive effects on traditional academic achievement,

[5]U.S. Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (2023) https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html. "Schools can deliberately foster connectedness in a number of ways … such steps can help all students - and not just the most vulnerable - do better." See also Moriah Balingit, 'A cry for help': CDC warns of a steep decline in teen mental health, THE WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 31, 2022, 1:00 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/31/student-mental-health-decline-cdc/..

including having higher grades and test scores, having better school attendance, and staying in school longer."[6]

Ample research shows that restorative justice practices improve school connectedness by building and healing relationships, teaching positive behaviors, and helping address the root causes of negative behaviors.[7] Techniques such as restorative circles, proactive circles, and restorative conferences provide opportunities for students, teachers, and administrators to prevent conflicts and work through issues after an incident. The use of restorative justice practices is also linked with improved academic outcomes, school climate, and staff-student relationships. Given the potential of school engagement to provide children with stability and access to services, as well as the need to foster safe, supportive learning communities, the use of research based Restorative Practices must be supported and expanded.

b. Educational Experts Agree that Exclusionary School Discipline Harms Children

Most experts agree that school exclusions do not effectively teach young people conflict resolution skills or result in improved educational outcomes. In contrast, restorative justice practices build and heal relationships, teach positive behaviors, and hold students accountable in constructive ways.[8] Implementing Restorative Practices and other pro-social, relationship-centered programs aligns directly with New York State's Social Emotional Learning

[6] CDC, Youth Connectedness Is an Important Protective Factor for Health and Well-being (last visited April 14, 2022), https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/youth-connectedness-important-protective-factor-for-health-well-being.htm.
[7] See U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color and Disabilities, (July 2019) https://www.usccr.gov/reports/2019/beyond-suspensions-examining-school-discipline-policies-and-connections-school-prison.
[8] See U.S. Comm'n on Civ. Rts, Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color and Disabilities, (July 2019) Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color with Disabilities | U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (usccr.gov)

benchmarks, which emphasize growth through practice, reflection, and connection—not through exclusion.[9]

The New York State Board of Regents has reaffirmed its commitment to reducing reliance on exclusionary school discipline.[10] We embrace the words of the New York State Commissioner of Education, Dr. Betty Rosa, who has consistently emphasized the need for supportive, relationship-centered school environments that prioritize student well-being alongside academic achievement:

> Punitive and exclusionary discipline rarely helps students understand how their inappropriate behaviors can have real world consequences. Learning and success are not solely academic in nature; they are dependent upon the social-emotional support that school districts are required to provide. All students must have equitable access to interventions that will support their holistic academic and social-emotional development as learners and developing, contributing members of society. Rather than immediately turning to punishment, districts should instead consider how they can help students learn to assume and accept responsibility for their behavior while simultaneously establishing remedial supports to foster, and thus augment, their emotional intelligence."[11]

Dr. Rosa's call to create learning communities where every student feels valued and connected reinforces the urgency of moving away from exclusionary discipline and toward practices that cultivate belonging, accountability, and growth.

c. Restorative Justice is a Cost-Effective Strategy

Restorative Justice and Practices have been woven through NYC Public Schools' Citywide Behavioral Expectations to Support Student Learning.[12] Despite the recognized

[9] Casel, Restorative Practices and SEL Alignment, https://schoolguide.casel.org/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/2020.12.11_Aligning-SEL-and-RP_Final.pdf; Casel, Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools, https://drc.casel.org/uploads/sites/3/2019/03/Restorative-Practices_-Fostering-Healthy-Relationships-Promoting-Positive-Discipline-in-Schools.pdf; New York State Education Dep't., New York State Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks (August 2018), https://p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NYSSELBenchmarks.pdf.

[10] Appeal of N.V.D. Decision No., 17,985 (April 2021) citing The University of the State of NY Ed. Dep't Resolution, Jan. 2019.

[11] Rosa,Betty, An equitable approach to student discipline (April 24, 3023) https://www.nyssba.org/news/2023/04/21/on-board-online-april-24-2023/an-equitable-approach-to-student-discipline/

[12] Citywide Behavioral Expectations (nyc.gov)

efficacy of restorative justice approach, the NYCPS continues to rely heavily on exclusionary school discipline. This ongoing dependence on suspensions undermines the very relationship centered- strategies the system has committed to and limits the potential of restorative practices to create safer, more supportive school communities, and deprives young people of the opportunity to learn how to deal with and respond to conflict, essential skills that would follow them into adulthood and lead to safer communities.

In 2018, the NYC Comptroller's office wrote:

> "[r]estorative practices, an alternative to exclusionary discipline, emphasize empathy, personal responsibility, and restoring community in the conflict resolution process. Examples from around the nation show that the approach has been highly effective in improving school climate and reducing suspensions. But transitioning to restorative practices requires investment in school-based consulting on implementation and capacity-building, and centralized program supports and evaluation."[13]

The cost of exclusionary school discipline cannot be measured solely in terms of the harm it inflicts on children's education and mental health, great though those harms may be. While full, citywide implementation of restorative justice requires an investment in training and staffing, exclusionary school discipline is not free either. Increased incidents in schools result in higher levels of police activity in each school. New York City also operates suspension hearing offices in all five boroughs, each staffed with a Suspension Director, a supervising attorney, and numerous Suspension Hearing Officers, Early Resolution Counselors, and clerical personnel. In addition, New York City runs about 22 Alternate Learning Centers, where students attend while they are suspended from their home schools. Each requires space, administrative staff, certified teachers and related professionals. These structures represent a considerable and ongoing financial commitment — one that could be ameliorated by taking a more effective and

[13] Safe and Supportive Schools: A Plan to Improve School Climate and Safety in NYC : Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander

restorative approach to student behavior and which underscores how costly exclusionary discipline truly is, both in human and economic terms.

Despite the recognized efficacy of Restorative Justice Practices, the NYCPS currently employs only about 20 Restorative Justice Coordinators to serve over 1800 schools. We ask the City Council to work with the Administration to baseline $12M for Restorative Justice Practices in the FY 2027 budget, add 10 more Restorative Justice Coordinators, and to work toward expanding funding to be consistent with the 2024 levels ($21M).

IV. Learning to Work Programs

The Learning to Work Program provides a vital lifeline to overaged and undercredited New York City students who need additional support to transition to adult life. Through the program, community based organizations partner with transfer schools and Young Adult Borough Centers[14] to offer students support services, job readiness and college exploration activities, and vocational internships. We have worked with many young people who, given a second chance, are able to complete their educations, gain skills through Learning to Work programs, and move on to vocational or higher education programs which lead to viable employment opportunities.

The program's current $31 million in funding is set to expire in June 2026 and was not included in the FY 2027 budget. Without restoration of these funds, hundreds of overage, under-credited students will lose access to the essential supports they need to earn a high school diploma and develop a viable postsecondary plan. We therefore urge the City to restore and baseline this funding to ensure the continued operation of the Learning to Work Program and the critical services it provides.

[14] Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers are small full time high schools which provide academically rigorous programs to reengage students who have fallen behind and help them earn a high school diploma.

V. The Mental Health Continuum

a. Mental Health Crisis for NYC Youth

New York continues to face an enduring youth mental health crisis—one that began long before the COVID-19 pandemic and was only intensified by it. The number of children and adolescents experiencing significant mental health challenges has risen sharply, while wait times for treatment remain unacceptably long, often stretching for weeks, months, or even more than a year. The consequences of untreated mental health needs in childhood and adolescence are profound and long-lasting. They are associated with lower academic achievement, higher rates of teenage pregnancy, unstable employment, substance use, behavioral challenges, poorer physical health outcomes, and increased involvement with both the juvenile and adult legal systems. One of the most devastating consequences of untreated mental health conditions is suicide, which remains the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24.[15]

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention warns of "an accelerating mental health crisis among adolescents with more than 4 in 10 teens reported they feel 'persistently sad or hopeless,' and 1 in 5 saying they have contemplated suicide."[16] These findings echo the alarm previously raised by the American Academy of Pediatrics, who in October of 2021 declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health.[17] At the time, pediatricians reported caring for young people experiencing soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness,

[15] American Academy of Pediatrics, School-Based Mental Health: Pediatric Mental Health Series, https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/mental-health-minute/school-based-mental-healthl/

[16] Moriah Balingit, 'A cry for help': CDC warns of a steep decline in teen mental health, THE WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 31, 2022, 1:00 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/31/student-mental-health-decline-cdc/.

[17] Pediatricians, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists and Children's Hospitals Declare National Emergency in Children's Mental Health, AM. ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY (October 19, 2021), https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/zLatest_News/Pediatricians_CAPs_Childrens_Hospitals_Declare_National_Emergency_Childrens_Mental_Health.aspx.

and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families and their communities.[18]" The December 2021 Advisory on Youth Mental Health issued by General Vivek H. Murthy, the U.S. Surgeon General, echoed much of the same alarm, outlining the pandemic's influence as well as the pre-pandemic mental health challenges.[19]

The consequences of inadequate mental-health resources fall disproportionately on our clients at The Legal Aid Society, who are low-income and come predominantly from underserved communities. Far too often, children and youth are unable to access meaningful help until they reach a point of crisis—at which time they or their families are pulled into the City's legal systems. These systems are costly, traumatizing, and fundamentally ill-equipped to address the mental-health needs of children.

As a result, young people frequently receive care in emergency rooms, hospitals, foster care placements, or juvenile justice facilities rather than through consistent, high-quality outpatient mental-health services that would allow them to remain stable and healthy in their communities. Compounding this, many schools lack the resources and training needed to respond appropriately to students in crisis. Instead, children are too often routed to Emergency Medical Services (EMS), suspended from school, or subjected to law-enforcement intervention for behaviors that stem from unmet mental-health needs.

b. School-Based Solutions to Address the Mental Health Crisis

Schools can play a pivotal role in connecting young people with the mental-health services they urgently need. Research consistently shows that children and adolescents are far more likely to seek behavioral and mental-health support when those services are readily accessible in school settings. School-based mental-health programs also help reduce racial disparities in access to care by meeting

[18] Id.
[19] U.S. Surgeon General, Protecting Youth Mental Health (2021), https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf.

students where they are and eliminating many of the barriers that families face when seeking community-based treatment. The benefits extend well beyond improved well-being. Access to school-based mental-health services is associated with increased attendance, stronger academic performance, and higher graduation rates. When schools are equipped to provide timely, high-quality support, students are more likely to remain engaged in their education and less likely to experience crises that lead to system involvement.

School-Based Mental Health Clinics (SBMHCs) provide direct and timely access to mental health treatment and support for students and their families. SBMHCs offer an array of mental health services to children at school during the school day, including an initial assessment, treatment plan, therapy, psychiatry, medication management, family peer support, and youth advocacy. This school-clinic partnership helps improve attendance, increase family engagement, and academic performance.

SBMHC staff collaborate with school staff to identify children who need mental health services, coordinate services, and facilitate prompt referral and access to assessment and evidence-based treatment. SBMHCs work to engage the entire family and can serve family members at their community location. In addition to providing proactive services, SBMHCs provide crisis mental health services, helping to ensure that children receive a supportive response without contacting 911 unnecessarily, avoiding needless emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and reducing the use of suspensions, police involvement, and other exclusionary, punitive disciplinary measures. For these reasons the Legal Aid Society supports expansion of school based mental health clinics.

c. Mental Health Continuum

Each year, The Legal Aid Society works with students experiencing significant mental health challenges without access to vital mental health services they need to succeed in the classroom. Consequently, we strongly support the Mental Health Continuum, a cross-agency partnership between New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to help students struggling with mental health challenges receive appropriate, and timely care. This innovative model, highlighted in the City Council's Mental

Health Road Map, is supported with $5 million in one-year city funding that was excluded from the Mayor's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget. Unless extended in the FY 27 budget, this funding is set to expire in June 2026, leaving students in high-need schools at risk of losing essential mental health services they need.

The Mental Health Continuum is unique in its comprehensive, integrated model and in its capacity to connect students with significant needs to expedited mental healthcare. Nearly 2,000 students have received direct mental health support through the Mental Health Continuum since 2023. For these services to continue and be sustained, Mental Health Continuum funding must be extended and baselined in FY 2027. The City Council was instrumental in securing funding for the Mental Health Continuum in prior budget cycles and in making this vital initiative a reality. We urge the Council to work with the Administration to ensure the FY 2027 budget includes and baselines $5M (NYCPS: $787K, H+H: $3.74M, DOHMH: $472K) to sustain the Mental Health Continuum so that students can continue to receive the mental health support they require to learn.

Prioritizing student mental health can no longer be treated as optional; it must be foundational to how schools operate. The social and emotional well-being of students is inseparable from academic outcomes, and educational systems that ignore this reality risk undermining both student success and school climate.[20]

Conclusion

Schools have the potential to be places of safety and belonging - spaces where children and young people can grow academically, socially, and emotionally, and ultimately make a successful transition into adulthood. To realize that vision, we must ensure that students can get to school, remain connected to school, and receive the support that allows them to thrive once they are there.

[20] New York State Education Dep't., Social Emotional Learning: A Guide to Systematic Whole School Implementation, https://p1232.nysed.gov/sss/documents/GuideToSystemicWholeSchoolImplementationFINAL.pdf

By guaranteeing that every child has access to reliable transportation, evidence-based reading interventions, sustainable and consistent mental-health supports, and restorative practices that build social-emotional skills, we strengthen communities and keep students in classrooms—learning, growing, and preparing for their futures. These investments not only support individual students; they create safer, healthier schools and neighborhoods across New York City.

Many thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Contact: Melinda Andra, Esq.
Attorney in Charge
Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project
The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Practice
E: mlandra@legal-aid.org
T: 646-866-4057

Kai-lin Hsu
Assistant Attorney in Charge
Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project
The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Practice
E: klhsu@legal-aid.org
T: 718-579-8112

Susan J. Horwitz (she/her/hers)
Director
Education Law Project
The Legal Aid Society
Civil Practice
T: (646) 588-8252
E: shorwitz@legal-aid.org

Chair and members of the NYC Council Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment. My name is Lizbeth Lucero. I am the Deputy Director of Advancement and Communications at The Urban Assembly.

I'm here to highlight the impact of The Urban Assembly and to express our deep gratitude to the council for its successful support of baselined Affinity funding in the FY26 budget. In making this funding recurring, the city has responded to the voices of students, educators, and communities and recognized the essential role that Affinity organizations play in strengthening New York City public schools. This stability allows organizations like ours to plan, innovate, and deliver impact with greater consistency and reach.

Across our **23 schools serving nearly 8,000 students**, The Urban Assembly advances a model within public education that integrates social-emotional learning, post-secondary readiness, and targeted 9th grade success systems. Together, our family of unscreened public schools achieved a **92% average graduation** rate this past school year.

In addition, The Urban Assembly serves as an innovation hub within New York City's public education ecosystem. By developing, piloting, and scaling effective practices across its network, the organization helps drive forward-thinking solutions that benefit not only its own schools but the broader system. The Urban Assembly's approach demonstrates how intentional, data-informed systems combined with whole-child support can create meaningful, scalable impact. Their work strengthens schools, supports educators, and ensures that students are not only graduating, but are prepared for what comes next.

I encourage the Council to continue investing in and partnering with organizations like The Urban Assembly that deliver proven results for New York City's students.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to educational equity.

FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

New York City Council
Committee on Education, Honorable Eric Dinowitz, Chair

Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York
Submitted by Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is among the City's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult — and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities.

The YMCA is also a proud member of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF), the Coalition for Community School Excellence (CCSE), and the Campaign for Children (C4C). As a member of these coalitions, we support their policy and budget agendas.

Baseline Essential Education Programs

We thank the Chair Dinowitz, Speaker Menin, and the City Council for their leadership and advocacy. Due to the support of the City Council, we have secured critical investments in last years budget. These investments ensured the continuation of essential education programs, staff, and services that were at risk of ending due to the expiration of temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. We thank the Mamdani Administration for including baseline funding in the Preliminary Plan for special education preschool services, and for summer programming. However, there are still a list of programs whose funding is set to expire July 1st, if the city does not extend and baseline funding.

YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK 5 West 63rd Street New York, NY 10023
cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org

In partnership with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, we call on the city to baseline funding for Learning to Work, restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family outreach, sensory exploration and education discovery, student success centers, toddler childcare, and early childhood education outreach. We urge the Administration to act in the Executive Budget, ensuring continued investment in the programs and services that sustain our children's well-being and development. The loss of these programs would jeopardize access to a quality education, undermining children's foundational years and threatening families' economic stability. We cannot afford to let these vital services disappear. We must commit to sustainably funding these programs in Fiscal Year 2027 and beyond. Let us make a commitment to elevate and empower the next generation of New Yorkers.

Programs at Risk

- **Learning to Work** programs which provide support to over-age, under-credited students to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan ($31M)
- **Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED)** programs for students with intensive sensory needs ($12M)
- **Infant/toddler (0–2) childcare** seats in high-need communities ($10M)
- **Restorative justice** programs that help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended ($12M).
- **Outreach** efforts that help ensure families are aware of the early childhood programs available to them ($5M).
- **The Mental Health Continuum** that provides mental healthcare to students at 50 schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn ($5M).
- **Immigrant family communication and outreach** that helps ensure families can receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access ($4M).
- **Student Success Centers** that help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college ($3.3M).

Community Schools

New York City is home to one of the largest portfolios of Community Schools in the nation and stands as a national leader in program implementation. Community Schools are proven to be a powerful strategy for improving student attendance, supporting social and emotional well-being, and connecting families to critical resources such as food, health care, mental health services, and social services. Community School providers, including organizations like the YMCA of Greater New York, which operates ten Community Schools across the city, play an essential role in supporting students far beyond the classroom. These schools foster life skills, leadership development, and meaningful community engagement, while also serving as trusted hubs of

support during times of crisis. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Schools were among the first responders, distributing food and clothing, providing translation services, and ensuring students had access to devices for remote learning. They mobilized support for families impacted by the two Bronx fire tragedies and continue to meet the needs of students and families in real time as need emerges. Community Schools are not solely educational programs; they are pillars of stability and trust for some of our most disenfranchised communities.

We are grateful to the City Council, the new administration, and NYCPS leadership for their clear commitment to uplifting the Community Schools strategy and embracing providers as true partners in advancing the Chancellor's core priorities of academic rigor, family engagement, equity and integration, and safety. This renewed leadership has demonstrated a willingness to listen and collaborate in a model that centers students and families, recognizing Community Schools as essential to achieving these shared goals. We applaud the continued commitment to protect Community Schools, keeping funding levels whole for Fiscal 2027 and in the outyears, representing and instilling trust between community-based organizations and government. Providers are no longer forced to fight year after year to restore critical services, allowing us to shift focus to the structural and operational challenges that must be addressed to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of Community Schools.

Despite the growth and demonstrated impact of the Community School strategy, barriers persist, including instability in federal and state funding streams, inefficient contracting and procurement systems, delays in payments, and understaffing within the Office of Community Schools (OCS). These challenges hinder implementation and strain program delivery, ultimately impacting the students and families we serve.

In addition to City-level action, we urge City and State leaders to work in partnership to strengthen education funding at the state level. The Foundation Aid formula must be both fully funded and updated to reflect the needs of our most vulnerable students. We support the inclusion of a per-pupil weight for students experiencing homelessness or in foster care—who currently receive no additional funding —as well as an increase to the weight for English Language Learners. These changes would direct hundreds of millions of additional dollars to New York City schools and better equip Community Schools to serve their students.

We also strongly support the establishment of a new, dedicated categorical funding stream for Community Schools in the State budget. While the existing Foundation Aid set-aside is appreciated, it lacks sufficient accountability and does not ensure that funds are used to implement the Community School strategy with fidelity. A dedicated funding stream (such as the $100 million proposed in the Assembly and $105 million proposed in the Senate one house budget bills) would allow districts and community partners to more effectively target resources

toward essential programming, coordination, and student supports. This investment should be viewed as a critical down payment toward the level of funding necessary to sustain and expand high-quality Community Schools statewide. At the same time, we caution against restrictive language that would limit funding only to schools already receiving support, and we urge the State to ensure that new funding expands access rather than reinforcing existing inequities.

At this critical moment for New York City's young people and families, the city must truly affirm its commitment to the Community Schools strategy. By strengthening existing systems and partnerships, protecting critical funding, investing in infrastructure and expanding access, we can ensure that Community Schools continue to serve as anchors of stability and equity for generations to come.

Budget Recommendations for Community Schools:

- **The city must protect Community School funding from potential federal threats,** including risks to key funding streams such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
- **Expand Office of Community Schools headcount from 20 to 28 full-time positions,** working toward a 15:1 program manager-to-provider ratio. This investment would help stabilize partnerships, address persistent contract and payment delays, and provide more targeted support to providers. The addition of a dedicated data analyst would further strengthen the system by improving data collection, supporting resource mapping, and ensuring fidelity to the Community School model while better measuring impact.
- **Engage community-based organizations as true partners in reimagining contracting and procurement processes for when contracts expire in Fiscal 2028.** Providers must have a seat at the table alongside OCS to help design a system that addresses longstanding challenges, including lengthy contract registration timelines, delayed payments, and administrative barriers. These inefficiencies place unnecessary financial strain on nonprofits and divert focus away from service delivery.
- Over the course of the Administration's first term, New York City should **expand the number of Community Schools** while maintaining fidelity to the model, beginning **with an additional 100 elementary schools by 2028.**

- **Fund a city-wide impact study on the Community School strategy.** The last city-wide study was published in 2020 and included data through the 2017-2018 school year. Issuing a new study would reveal key insights into the impact of city's community school's portfolio and any implementation barriers that should be addressed in future expansion.

Early Childhood Education and the Continuum of Care

We applaud Mayor Mamdani and his Administration for including historic investments to expand 2-K and 3-K. This achievement reflects not only the collaborative partnership between the Administration and the City Council, but also the dedication of families and early childhood providers across the city. The Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Plan also includes historic baselined funding for summer programming, ensuring that children have access to year-round learning and enrichment opportunities. While this is truly a historic moment, we must in good faith urge the Administration to protect and invest in a full continuum of care that supports children, youth, and families from birth through 12th grade. As we expand access to early childhood education, seamless coordination between city agencies and community-based organizations is critical. Additionally, we must see fully funded, holistic out-of-school time for K-12.

Citywide, 80% of families cannot afford childcare or afterschool programs. Families may spend up to 63% of their annual income on care, with the Bronx and Brooklyn most impacted. The inability to secure childcare resulted in a loss of $23 billion in economic activity in New York City in 2022. In 2023, families earning between $32,000 and $65,000 annually left the city at the highest rates. Early childhood programs and out-of-school time services work in tandem to support children's development while enabling families to balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Early childhood education is a vital part of New York City's social and economic ecosystem, allowing parents to work, supports children's growth, and strengthens communities.

The YMCA's early childhood programs serve nearly 800 children. The need for early childhood education continues to increase across the city, with the YMCA having a waitlist at more than half of our program sites. The YMCA has long advocated for universal access to high-quality early childhood education, and we are encouraged that our programs will be part of the proposed expansion under both city and state budget plans. However, these investments will only succeed if providers and the workforce have the infrastructure needed to operate sustainably. To sustain this system and meet growing demand, we need fully staffed agency divisions, clear and timely communication, and designated points of contact. These supports are essential to ensure smooth hiring and onboarding processes, and to maximize enrollment.

The YMCA Afterschool program, including Beacon, SONYC, COMPASS, Community Schools, and Cornerstone sites—serves nearly 15,000 children and teens daily. These programs help young people build academic skills, foster social-emotional development, strengthen relationships, and boost confidence. For many families, afterschool programs are not just enrichment—they are essential. High-quality afterschool programs combat learning loss, support workforce readiness, and provide affordable care that working families depend on.

In addition to school-year programming, the YMCA plays a central role in summer youth development through Summer Rising. Summer camp remains one of our most impactful programs. Last summer, over 17,000 children participated across 67 camp sites, including more than 5,600 Summer Rising participants. To support this effort, we employed over 1,200 camp

counselors and 685 participants from the Summer Youth Employment Program. These numbers represent real impact, children learning and thriving in safe, supportive environments. For these reasons, we strongly urge the City Council and the Mamdani Administration to ensure the timely release of COMPASS and SONYC RFP awards to avoid service disruptions and ensure continuity of care.

The City must address ongoing operational challenges faced by community-based organizations delivering early childhood, afterschool, and summer programming. This includes:

- Establishing clear communication between NYCPS and DYCD
- Expanding family-centered, community-driven enrollment strategies
- Guaranteeing timely payments to providers
- Investing in the childcare workforce

We call on the Mayor and City Council to prioritize universal access to early childhood education, childcare, and youth services. Strengthening this continuum ensures that every child has access to high-quality programs, the workforce is sustainable and adequately compensated, and families can fully participate in the city's economy. The YMCA looks forward to working with the Administration and City Council to ensure that these expansions create stability for the sector and opportunities for working families.

Budget Recommendations for Early Childhood and the Childcare Continuum

- **Implement Cost Escalators in Child Care Contracts.** The Birth-to-Five contracts, introduced in 2021, were a major step forward. However, maintaining flat funding fails to account for rising costs. The YMCA urges the City to implement annual cost escalators of at least 3% to address increases in insurance, utilities, and other expenses.
- **Ensure On-Time Payments**. We appreciate the City Council's efforts to improve payment transparency. The city must continue reducing delays by streamlining processes and fully staffing relevant divisions.
- **Increase Advance Payments**. Increasing advance payments to at least 75% of contract value would improve cash flow and allow providers to better plan and operate effectively.
- **Protect Providers from Enrollment-Based Penalties**. If enrollment is centrally controlled, providers should not be penalized for under-enrollment. Community-based providers should receive the same protections as public school programs.
- **Restore the Birth-to-Two Child Care Initiative**. This program is critical for families with infants and toddlers. The YMCA urges restoration of $20 million in funding to sustain and expand access.

- **Support the Early Childhood Workforce**. The workforce—primarily women and women of color—remains underpaid and undervalued. Without competitive wages and career sustainability, we risk losing skilled educators. Achieving pay parity is essential to retaining talent and ensuring program quality.
- **Expand services for children with disabilities, English Language Learners, students in foster care, and children in temporary housing.** Providing year-round programming, extended-day options, and inclusive, multilingual outreach. Ensure support staff for students with disabilities, such as paraprofessionals are available for students who need them for out of school time programs.
- **Improve the Background Check Process.** Because the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) clearance process can take several months, the agency should work with providers to expedite processes and remove bureaucratic hurdles so prospective staff can begin working sooner

At a time when families are being priced out of New York City and providers are struggling to keep their doors open, we cannot afford to underinvest in the very systems that support children and working families. A strong continuum of care—from early childhood through adolescence—is not optional; it is essential to the city's economic stability and future. We urge the Council to act decisively in the Executive Budget to protect and sustain these critical investments.

If you have any questions, please contact Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy, at cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org.

THE BROTHERHOOD SISTER SOL

512 W. 143rd Street
New York, NY 10031
212.283.7044
www.brotherhood-sistersol.org

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

For over 30 years, The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) has been at the forefront of social justice; educating, organizing and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. BroSis provides around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, making space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD *and* holistically support student success. Our vision for education in New York public schools includes safe, restorative, and healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must equitably resource New York State public schools and defund the tactics that push out marginalized students.

Faced with mental health, loneliness, and homelessness polycrises, now more than ever, our youth need city officials to do *more*. The current budget is a step in the right direction. That said, our communities are contending with federal threats to our education system and our LGBTQIA+ and non-citizen family members. Our city budget, therefore, needs to fully fund meaningful Restorative Justice, mental health, and immigrant protections in schools. City Council members should redirect the funding currently going to school police and policing infrastructure to the healing-centered programs and staff our schools, without which our schools cannot thrive. Moreover, we ask that you divest from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and funding for surveillance technology.

Thereafter, the City Council should prioritize the following in budget negotiations:

1. Endowing access to childcare, 2K-12, and CUNY public education systems *and* ensuring any funding lost by due to historic or impending funding cuts is restored
2. Funding meaningful support for *all* marginalized New Yorkers – including legal, mental health, medical, and other essential services.
3. Allocating money to efforts that directly benefit NYC youth – YWI, SYEP, etc.
4. Investing in Crisis to Care and Wellness continuua that transform, not end, lives
5. Staking money on housing efforts prioritized in City for All efforts of 2025

To advance and protect our city and this next generation, we must provide them with the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be engaged and innovative world citizens. We need elected officials to invest in our students, our communities, and our success – now more than ever.

For more information, contact the Senior Organizing Strategist, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org.

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget—Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Education Budget.

My name is Madison Pinckney. I am an attorney on the Postsecondary Readiness Project at Advocates for Children of New York, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Transition Alliance, a coalition of more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving transition planning for students with disabilities in New York City. Together, we represent students, parents, advocates, and professionals working to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind as they prepare for life after high school.

I am here to discuss the need to **increase funding for travel training**, which helps students with disabilities learn the skills needed to navigate public transit and travel independently, exponentially expanding their post-secondary opportunities while reducing reliance on yellow school bus service.

Travel training is currently offered to students primarily through New York City Public Schools' District 75 Travel Training Program. It uses one-on-one instruction to teach students with disabilities how to navigate public transit between their homes and schools while building their sense of confidence and agency. However, the current program is small, serving only a fraction of the students who need it. Families have expressed how valuable travel training would be for their children—not just for long-term independence, but for immediate needs like getting to internships, classes, or jobs.

Through our work, the Transition Alliance has seen first-hand how travel training can change the trajectory of a student's life.

I worked with a high school junior who dreamed of becoming a chef. She was accepted into an after-school vocational program that would give her hands-on kitchen experience and put her on a path toward that goal. But there was one major barrier: the program did not provide transportation, and she had never been taught how to navigate public transit safely on her own.

Without a way to get there, she was on the verge of losing that opportunity entirely. Her family tried to piece together solutions by adjusting work schedules to accompany her and exploring costly travel alternatives, but none were sustainable. What should have been an exciting step toward her future instead became a source of stress and uncertainty.

The student's parents tried to get her travel training but were unable to access it. With no other option, the parents worked tirelessly to travel train the student themselves. The student learned how to map her route, navigate buses and subways, and problem-solve along the way. Within weeks, she was traveling independently—not just to her vocational program, but throughout the city.

This was not just about transportation. It was about access, confidence, and independence. Because she could get there, she could participate. Because she could participate, she could build skills, connections, and a future aligned with her goals. Without travel training, this student would have stayed home. With it, she moved closer to her career. While this student's parents had the ability to travel train their child, many parents do not feel equipped to do so. For most students, this story would have ended differently.

While NYCPS offers a range of programs to support students' postsecondary goals, many do not provide transportation. Without the ability to travel independently, many students with disabilities are effectively shut out of these opportunities.

At the same time, limited NYCPS travel training program capacity and long waitlists prevent many students from accessing the travel training they need.

Therefore, we are calling on the City to **invest $2M to expand access to travel training**, so it can serve more students with disabilities. This funding would expand access to travel training for students with disabilities in District 1-32 schools, while also increasing capacity within District 75 schools. Funding would also support contracts with experienced community-based organizations that already provide high-quality travel training. These partners could train students directly while also building the capacity of school staff to scale the program. This expansion would help students develop the comprehensive travel skills needed for full participation in their communities, including access to internships, work-based learning, post-secondary opportunities, and employment.

Investing in travel training is a major way to support the independence and agency of students with disabilities by promoting their ability to travel between home and school, internships and ultimately post-secondary education or employment.

Travel training can be the difference between a student graduating with the skills they need to be independent in adulthood and one who is left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony of Paul-Anthony Urbanek,
a member of Youth Council of the Transition Alliance, prepared for the
New York City Council
Education Budget Hearing

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget—Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the Education Budget. My name is Paul-Anthony Urbanek. I am a former NYC public school student with a disability and a member of the Youth Council for the Transition Alliance. Today, I am here to discuss the need to **increase funding for travel training**, which helps students with disabilities learn the skills needed to navigate public transit and travel independently.

Learning how to independently navigate New York City is important for so many reasons: It opens possibilities for people; it builds a sense of self-worth; it saves the city money; and sometimes means a lot more.

When I was younger, I would travel around the city with my mother on trains and buses. I loved going around the City with her. When my mom got sick with cancer, she would trust me to go to the store alone and to church to say her prayers. When I was 18, my mother passed away and I had no one else and I entered into foster care. At that time, my school became very protective of me and didn't think I was ready or in the right condition to be travel trained. I didn't agree with them and I felt like I was being cheated and that my future was being delayed against my wishes.

It took more than 4 years for the DOE to finally travel train me even though I continuously asked to be trained. The DOE kept telling me I just needed to wait. All this time I had to rely on Access-A-Ride to go anywhere including to my job I had at the time. Anyone who knows, knows you can't rely on Access-A-Ride. I would ask myself, "if my job believes in me and relies on me to complete my work, then the DOE should believe in me as someone who is capable of using the City's transit system." It wasn't until I turned 22 that the DOE decided I was ready to be travel trained. The training took less than two weeks.

Too many students who are ready to be taught how to travel independently are not given the opportunity.

I am calling on the City to invest $2M to expand the availability of travel training so more students with disabilities can get this important training as soon as they are ready.

Thank you.

Testimony of the Trust for Public Land to the New York City Council Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, and other members of the Education Committee. My name is Sophie Stelboum and I am a program coordinator at the NYC Playgrounds Program for the Trust for Public Land.

Since 1996, the Trust for Public Land has partnered with city agencies and many City Council Members to convert over 230 asphalt lots into vibrant school-community playgrounds. Featuring shade trees, gardens, athletic courts, running tracks and outdoor classrooms, these sites provide close-to-home places to gather, exercise and play for students and neighbors alike.

Numerous studies show that access to outdoor play and nature relieves stress, increases physical activity, improves mental health, and decreases social isolation for both adults and youth. These playgrounds depend on annual custodial funding to ensure they remain safe, clean, and accessible to the community outside of school hours.

While roughly 270 sites receive this essential funding for maintenance through PlaNYC and the Parks Department, it is possible to open more than 300 additional sites to the public, through baseline funding for custodial support.

The Division of School Facilities estimates that it costs $72,000 per year to open a schoolyard to the public. Adding 15 schoolyards per year moving forward, as stated in Council Member Brewer's proposed bill 0566, would cost the city a little over $1M per year - an easy, cost-effective way to increase play space within a walkable distance from home, while prioritizing those in environmental justice areas.

Parks and playgrounds are more crucial than ever, affording economical and research-based solutions to public health and loneliness in every neighborhood.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee this afternoon. We greatly appreciate your attention to these important issues.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND®

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

About Us

TPL is a national nonprofit that creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

For more than 50 years, we've been using nature and the outdoors as powerful forces for connection, equity, and community well-being.

Photo: Joe Martinez

PS 156 Waverly and LS 392 - Brooklyn, NY

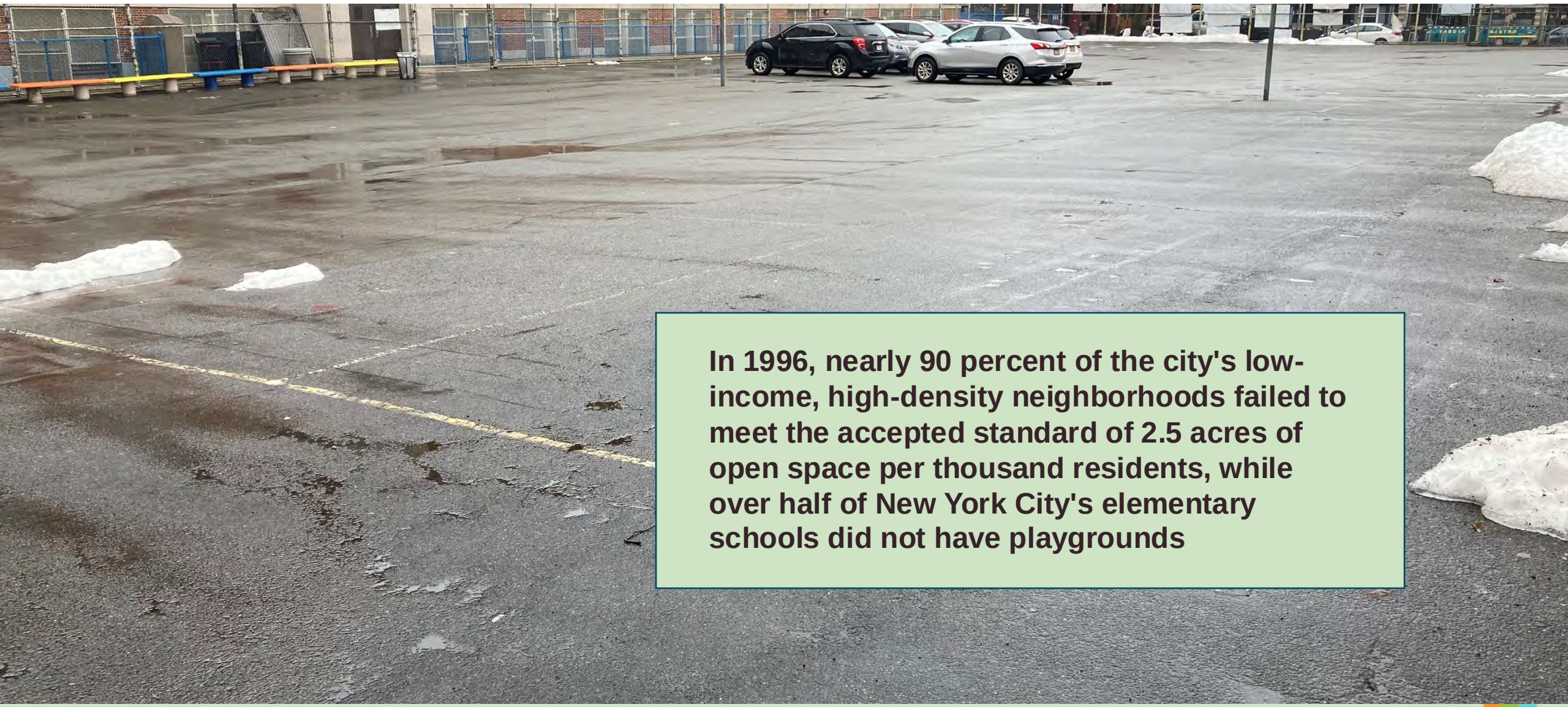
Building a Greener, Healthier New York City

Partnering to Transform Schoolyards into Environmentally Resilient Community Playgrounds

PS 204K, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND®

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™



In 1996, nearly 90 percent of the city's low-income, high-density neighborhoods failed to meet the accepted standard of 2.5 acres of open space per thousand residents, while over half of New York City's elementary schools did not have playgrounds

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

NYC Community Schoolyards Program Origins – 1996
The Need for Green Play Spaces for Children

The Solution:

Transform Empty Asphalt Schoolyards into Nature-Rich Community Playgrounds

Piagentini & Jones Schoolyard
Throgs Neck, Bronx

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Over 25-years, our partnership with New York's City Council, DOE, SCA and DEP has helped us to provide enriching outdoor spaces for those most in need of them.

Our playgrounds feature resiliency integrated designs that include storm-water-capture turf fields, shade trees, gardens, and recreational facilities that provide places to gather, exercise and play for students and neighbors alike.

MS 184X, Morrisania, Bronx
Opened June 2025

Before

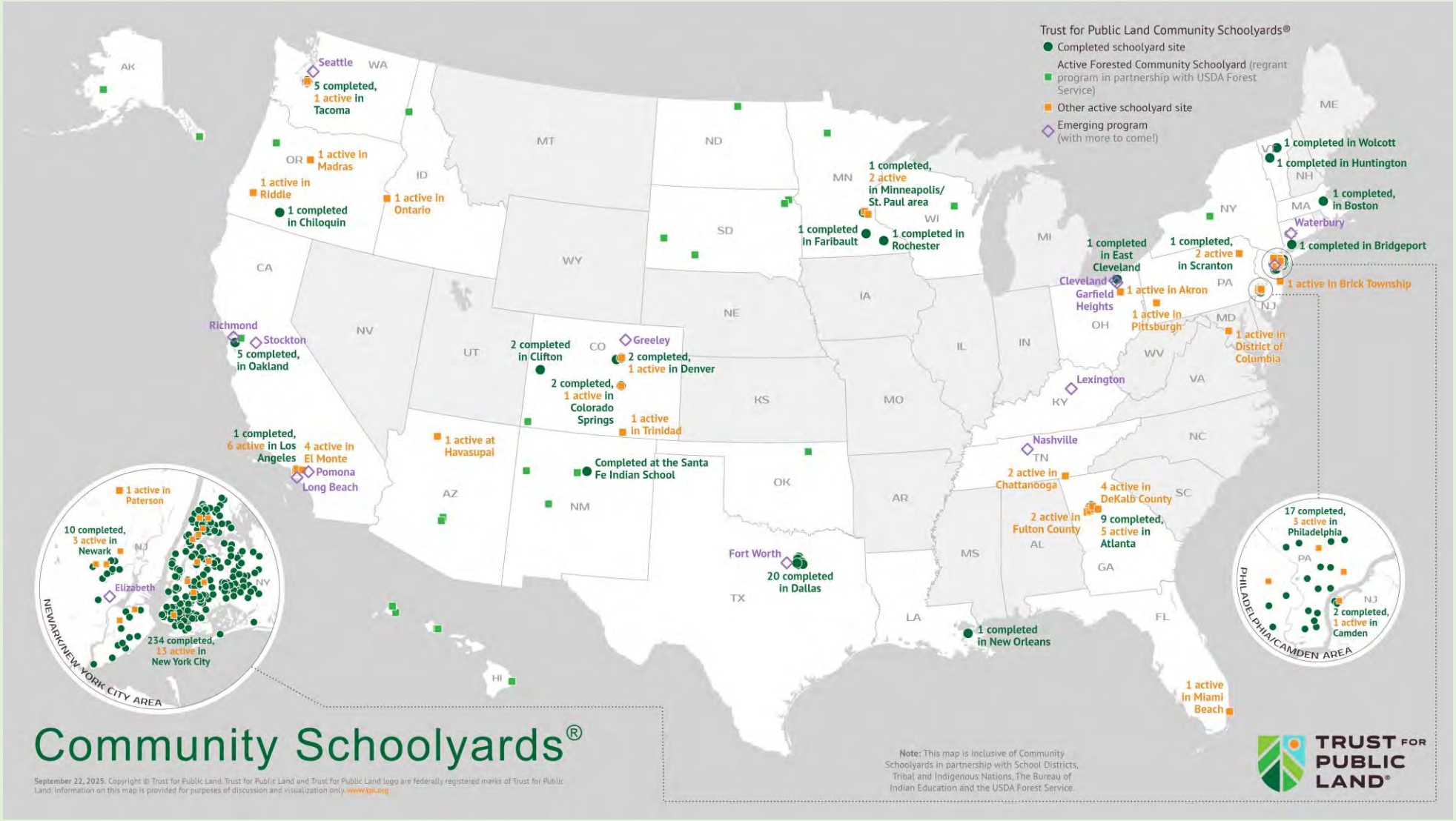
After

TPL's NYC Community Schoolyards

- **235+** playgrounds and parks created
- **4+ million** people within a 10-minute walk of our parks
- **67 million** gallons of storm water captured

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Flagship NYC Program Inspired TPL to Expand Community Schoolyards Nationally



Site Selection

We choose schoolyard projects based on these broad criteria:

- Neighborhood Need and Equity, determined through TPL's GIS mapping tool
- School and Schoolyard Characteristics (size, visibility, school's agreement to open after school hours)
- Extreme Weather Mitigation Potential (soil permeability, flood zone)

MS 35K, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn
Opened Oct. 9, 2025

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

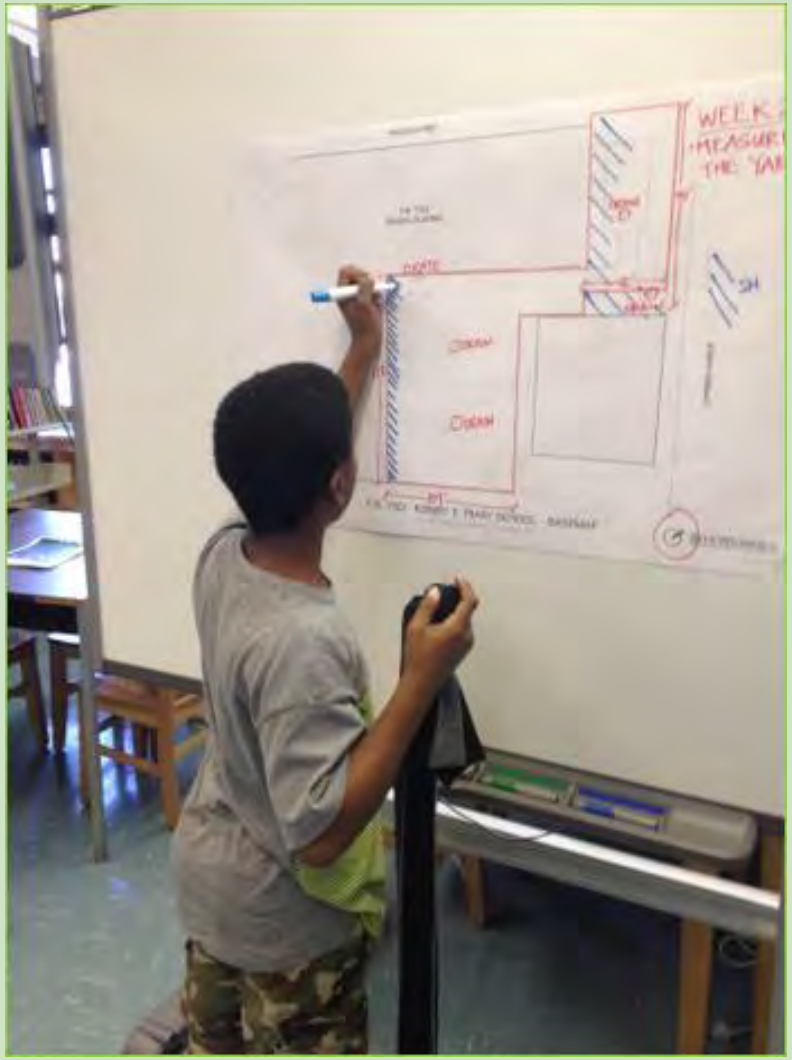
Participatory Design at NYC Public Schools

MS 354K, Crown Heights, Brooklyn

- Students are the project **ambassadors** / lead designers who must approach task with all users in mind.
- Skills development, introduction to careers, **civic engagement**
- **Project-based learning** with visible outcome creates agency, and a stake in long-term success of the space
- Schools can be a great **anchor for neighborhood transformation**

Participatory Design – Studying Existing Conditions

PS 60R, Bull's Head, Staten Island



PS 75Q, Ridgewood, Queens

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Participatory Design: Students Take the Lead

MS 354K Crown Heights, Brooklyn

IS 224X, Mott Haven, Bronx

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Participatory Design: Discussing Equity

EQUITY – Is there something for everyone in your schoolyard?

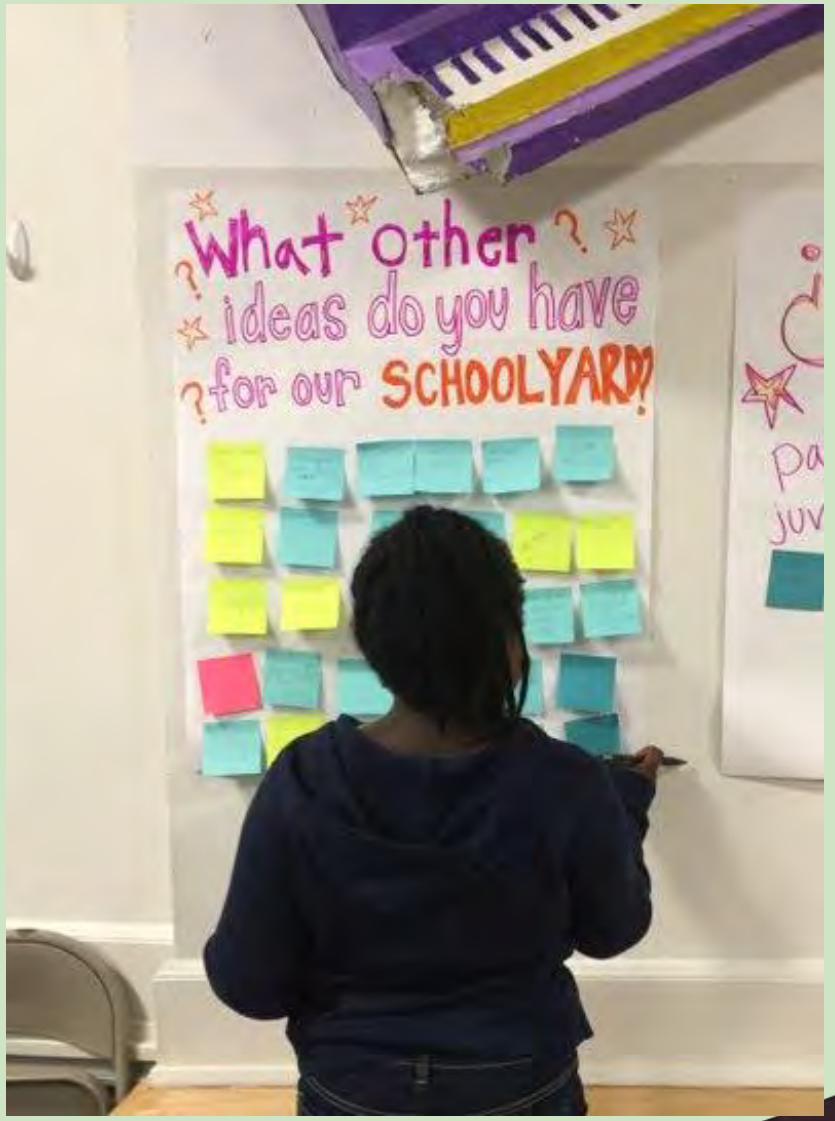
Directions: With your table, discuss the listed zones of activity. Who do you think will most use each activity zone? Place a sticker next to the group/groups you think will most use each activity zone.

Activity	Boys	Girls	Younger	Older	Community Members
Field (soccer, football)					
Basketball					
Track					
Stage					
Trees and Benches					
Hangout area					
Fitness Equipment					
Play Equipment					
Turf Pod					

PS 164K, Borough Park, Brooklyn

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Community Engagement



PS 152K/315K, Midwood, Brooklyn

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Resilient Design Close Up

On average each site captures 1 million gallons of stormwater a year through rain gardens and infiltrating turf fields.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Resilient Design Close Up

- Learning Gardens/Outdoor Classrooms
- Environmental Education Signs

- Porous Surfacing
- Green Roofs on Sheds and Gazebos
- Turf fields capture stormwater

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Connecting Students to Nature

We want to foster and support a love of nature

PS 98Q, Douglaston, Queens

- Each yard include 20-30 trees, which the students help select.
- Most sites include learning gardens, which students plan and plant.
- Outdoor classrooms offer spaces for students get hands-on introductions to botany, pollination, and other earth sciences, when they plant flowers, vegetables and herbs.
- We've built raised vegetable beds, sensory gardens, pollinator plantings, rain gardens, and forest walks

Students Present Final Design

JHS 227K, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Construction

Grand Opening Ceremony

PS 92M
Central Harlem
Manhattan

Stewardship and Activation

PS 111Q, Long Island City, Queens

TPL raises funds for staffing, ongoing stewardship, activation, and environmental education programs for each of our sites.

City Council's Crucial Role

- Reso-A: City Council members fund design and construction
- Advocate for baseline custodial funding

IS 145Q, Jackson Heights, Queens

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Custodial Funding is Key to Success and Expansion of Program

Key to success of this program is the annual custodial funding that ensures the renovated schoolyards remain safe and accessible for community use outside of school hours.

PS 145K, Bushwick, Brooklyn

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

MS 354K
Opening Ceremony

Thank you!

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Questions?

Please contact us:

Mary Alice Lee
Director
NYC Community Schoolyards

MaryAlice.Lee@tpl.org
(917) 363-9372

P.S. 111M, Hell's Kitchen

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Testimony: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education

Committee on Education

Re: Fiscal Year 27 Preliminary Budget - Education

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget.

United Way of New York City (UWNYC) submits this testimony on behalf of the New Yorkers we serve. For over 100 years, UWNYC has worked alongside New Yorkers facing financial hardship, health barriers, and educational inequity. We write today with two interconnected priorities: sustaining the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative and investing in UWNYC's Pathways to Possibilities initiative, our college- and career-readiness program for high school students from historically underserved communities.

Sustaining the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative (LCI)

Our primary ask is straightforward: allocate $5,507,000 in FY27 to sustain and accelerate the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative, a citywide effort to build a culturally responsive PK–12 curriculum that reflects the histories, contributions, and lived experiences of Latine communities in New York City Public Schools. The Latinidad Curriculum Initiative, funded through the council's Education Equity Action Plan Initiative, is approaching its third year of curriculum development, with the goal to deliver a finalized, refined, and piloted PK-12 curriculum, and a comprehensive professional development and support plan to enable district-wide adoption and long-term impact by the end of FY27. We thank the council for these past investments.

In a city where roughly 40% of public-school students identify as Latino or Hispanic, this is not a supplemental investment. It's a core equity commitment. Latine communities enrich the fabric of New York City, yet their narratives too often remain sidelined in curricula, and in the broader civic story our institutions tell. Our young people deserve an education that includes Latinidad not as an add-on, but as a fundamental part of how we teach history, civics, literature, and the arts. This is how students come to understand themselves and one another. This is how we build a school system that reflects the city we serve.

A renewed investment for FY27 will allow Latinidad to expand public engagement, deepen collaboration with educators and community partners, and develop high-quality, grade-band-aligned materials that are classroom-ready. Our goal is a robust PK–12 curriculum that equips educators with rigorous projects, resources, and professional learning supports, designed to complement existing core subject-area standards and deliver Latinidad as integrated, interdisciplinary learning rather than a standalone unit.

Investing in Pathways to Possibilities

We also urge the Council to allocate $850,000 in FY27 for UWNYC's Pathways to Possibilities initiative (Application ID: 2194612), our college- and career-readiness program serving public high school students in grades 9–12 from low-income, first-generation backgrounds across New York City. The program addresses persistent opportunity gaps by providing students with early exposure to career pathways, individualized guidance, and the practical tools needed to successfully transition from high school to postsecondary education or the workforce.

Through career exploration panels, one-on-one mentorship, and hands-on workshops, students engage directly with professionals who reflect their lived experiences and career aspirations. Participants also receive personalized support with college applications, financial literacy, FAFSA completion, and navigation of postsecondary options, including two- and four-year colleges, vocational training, and credential-based career pathways. In FY24, UWNYC coordinated 3 college and career events serving 980 high school students; post-event surveys showed that 80% of participants reported an improved understanding of available career pathways and increased confidence in their ability to explore future opportunities.

Pathways to Possibilities and Latinidad are complementary investments. Latinidad gives students a curriculum that reflects who they are. Pathways gives them the tools and relationships to determine where they're going. Together, they represent a coherent vision of what equitable education actually looks like for New York City's young people.

We urge the Council to allocate $5,507,000 for the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative and $850,000 for Pathways to Possibilities in FY27: investments that together build an equitable, inclusive education for every New York City student.

Thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of New York City's students and families. We welcome any questions.

With gratitude,

United Way of New York City

About Us

United Way of New York City has been serving low-income New Yorkers for over 85 years. As a backbone organization, we coordinate cross-sector efforts across food access, education, health equity, and economic mobility. Through a network of more than 600 community-based partners, we connect resources to where they're needed most and advocate for structural solutions to poverty. Our work centers equity, trust, and long-term impact—because every New Yorker deserves the opportunity to thrive.

Urban Youth Collaborative

My name is Ammy. I'm a high school senior at a community school in Brooklyn. I am also a youth leader at Make the Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative.

With the current federal administration, New York City must continue to protect immigrant students by moving away from all forms of school policing and punitive practices. It's time to redirect funding from systems that fuel the school-to-prison and deportation pipelines and instead invest in systems that truly support and protect students, like me.

After a long day at school, I am here because I care about real safety. I do not want more police. I want more counselors, mental health support, restorative justice, and college access. Schools should be places where students feel safe to learn and grow. There's no evidence that police in schools PREVENT conflict; if anything, they often make things worse.

In my experience, having police in my school is disruptive. Every morning, students arrive on time for school, but we are forced to stand in long lines, waiting to go through scanners and metal detectors, which makes us late to class. On top of that, the school police often speak to us disrespectfully and pull students aside for extra searches.

It feels like there's no way to win. Despite my best efforts to be on time and do well, I never feel welcome. Instead, I feel targeted. I have seen friends humiliated and embarrassed by unnecessary searches that turn up nothing. During a scan, they suspected my friend of hiding something under her shirt, so she was taken into the bathroom and had to lift her shirt for a full search. Nothing was found. She came out angry, and that moment stayed with her for the rest of the day; and honestly, it affected all of us who witnessed it. We all still remember that moment vividly. Experiences like this make school feel less like a place of learning and more like a place where we are treated with suspicion instead of care.

At the same time, I have two amazing teachers, my ELA teacher and my Model UN teacher, who make me feel truly safe at school. They have supported me through tough times and helped me grow as a student. Just seeing them smile when I walk in reminds me that I'm in a place where I'm valued. Now, imagine if every student had supportive staff like them; the impact would be powerful. Instead of being greeted by police yelling at us in the hallways, we would be met with care, respect, and the support we need to succeed.

Under the previous administration of Mayor Adams, he prioritized funding for more school police than counselors, social workers, or restorative justice staff. That's why we are calling on the City Council and our new mayor to choose differently. We need you to fully fund our futures and true

March 23, 2026

Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education. My name is Louisa Foy, and I am a chef with Wellness in the Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

In my work in New York City public schools, I spend my days not just cooking, but connecting with students—talking with them about what they're eating, encouraging them to try new foods, and helping them build healthy habits that can last a lifetime. For many of these students, the meals they receive at school are the most consistent source of nourishment in their day.

That's why nutritious school meals must be treated as an essential part of every child's education. When students are well-fed, they are better able to focus, participate, and thrive in the classroom. When they are not, learning becomes that much harder. This is not just about food—it's about equity. Every child deserves access to fresh, healthy meals prepared with care, regardless of their background or neighborhood.

I've seen how powerful a well-prepared meal can be. When we serve flavorful, culturally relevant food, students are more willing to engage, try new things, and feel respected. But I've also seen the strain on school kitchens when staffing is limited. When there aren't enough hands, it becomes harder to prepare meals from scratch, harder to connect with students, and harder to deliver the quality that our children deserve.

That's why we are calling on the Council to invest in School Food Service Workers. These workers are at the heart of the system, yet they are too often under-resourced and underpaid. Adequate staffing and livable wages are critical to ensuring that school kitchens can function effectively and that students receive the meals they need.

We also urge a comprehensive review of New York City's food service workforce, including career pathways, job titles, wages, kitchen staff-to-student ratios, and professional development opportunities. Strengthening these systems will allow us to improve meal quality, expand food education, and better support students' health and well-being.

WELLNESS IN THE SCHOOLS

At Wellness in the Schools, we see every day how food can transform a school environment. With the right investments, we can ensure that every child in New York City experiences that benefit.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to our students.

Sincerely,
Louisa Foy
Chef, Wellness in the Schools

March 23, 2026

Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and esteemed members of the New York City Council Committee on Education. My name is Miles Toussant, and I am a chef with Wellness in the Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today.

My role places me inside school kitchens across New York City, where I work alongside School Food Service Workers to prepare meals at scale. I see both what is possible—and what is challenging—within our current system.

School meals are one of the largest public nutrition programs in the city, and they should be a cornerstone of every child's school experience. For many students, these meals are not supplemental—they are essential. Ensuring their quality and consistency is a matter of both public health and educational equity.

Delivering high-quality, nutritious meals requires more than good intentions. It requires a well-supported workforce. Right now, many school kitchens are operating with limited staff, tight schedules, and insufficient resources. These constraints make it difficult to cook from scratch, introduce fresh ingredients, or consistently meet higher standards for meal quality.

Investing in School Food Service Workers is one of the most effective ways to strengthen this system. Adequate staffing levels and livable wages would allow kitchens to operate more efficiently, reduce burnout, and create the conditions needed to improve the food being served.

We also recommend a comprehensive review of New York City's food service workforce. This review should examine career pathways, job classifications, wages, kitchen staff-to-student ratios, and access to professional development. A stronger workforce structure will directly support better outcomes for students.

When we build the right systems—when staff are trained, supported, and adequately resourced—efforts to improve school meal quality, expand food education, and address food insecurity become far more effective.

Nutritious school meals should not depend on circumstance or capacity—they should be a guaranteed part of every student's day. With targeted investments, New York City can lead the way in building a school food system that reflects that commitment.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,
Miles Toussant
Chef, Wellness in the Schools

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, Committee, and Council Members,

My name is Sophia Vazquez, I am a current doctoral student at Teachers College, and a member of the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative team, or LCI.

I am here to deliver testimony on behalf of Dr Ezekiel Dixon-Román, director of the Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Advanced Study and member of the leadership team of the LCI. This is his testimony:

"We are grateful for the Council's support in our first two years and respectfully make our **budget request of 2.35M dollars on behalf of Teachers College.**

Founded in 1973, the Gordon Institute is committed to critically examining and reshaping the lives and education of socially precarious and racialized populations. Through the development of a culturally responsive ethnic studies curriculum and the centering of students, teachers, and community interests, the LCI is one of many initiatives that follows the mission and legacy of the Gordon Institute that seeks to enable the success of *all* New York City Public School students.

Given that over 85% of educators are using AI in the classroom, we introduced a focus on AI in the LCI in 2026. We are developing and conducting a survey on Latine youth understandings, uses, and perspectives on ethics and fairness with AI as well as how English or Spanish prompting and AI-generated output may impact them. This survey data will be used to inform culturally responsive professional learning and curricular content with AI.

Full funding of our Proposal will allow us to engage youth in workshops with the AI survey data to develop curriculum materials to design and pilot lessons and resources.

It will also enable us to use the AI survey data and implications in a series of workshops with educators to develop professional learning frameworks and modules. Through the workshop series we will learn from educators how they are using AI while also develop professional learning in collaboration with them.

In this rapidly changing technological landscape of education, the AI focus of the LCI will ensure that we're able to meet this committee's goals of equity for all students."

Thank you for your time.

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education
Hon. Eric Dinowtz
March 23, 2026

March 27, 2026

Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. My name is Virginia Johnson, founding member and former Artistic Director of Dance Theatre of Harlem, the internationally acclaimed ballet company and school located on Sugar Hill in Harlem.

New York's position as the country's arts capital drew me here in my youth. And still, almost 60 years later, much has changed but making art of all kinds has remained a vital part of what defines this city across the globe. And while New York remains a magnet for artists to fulfill their dreams, as significant is New York's recognition of arts education as an imperative—ideally for every child.

Despite crushing budget demands, the City Council has already demonstrated that arts education has deep validity. Last week (March 18) you heard from the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable with specific requests for additional funding and I write in support of the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition. I do not take lightly proposing to prioritize funding that supports the arts education workforce. I understand fully that the city has a responsibility to every citizen, but I ask, what kind of future are we building? What kind of communities are we building? What character are we building in our young people? How are we building harmony into the dynamic of multiple cultures jammed together in this magnificent metropolis?

I'm not a finance person, and don't know if there is data to support the notion I have that the ROI for arts education far exceeds the cost. My thinking is based on the idea that the place of art in our lives is broader than we typically imagine. We too often think of the arts in lofty terms. It supposedly exists to elevate our spirts or to entertain us. The arts, though, are a golden thread that weaves through every part of our lives, no matter our social or economic status, informing the conscious and unconscious choices that shape the quality of our lives.

The people whose work it is to prepare and nurture that golden thread are, like everyone else, riding the subway, buying groceries, keeping roofs over their heads. The teachers, teaching artists, administrators who run the programs as well as the arts organizations, private training schools, and community centers that develop arts education activities all are part of the continuity of artmaking. I myself have played many roles and have by now seen a generation or two go from studying ballet at Dance Theatre of Harlem to becoming doctors, lawyers, arts administrators, bus drivers and educators. Arts education makes strong citizens as well as future artists.

Engagement with the arts enables us to realize our full potential as valuable participants in society. From the life skills and structure learned through training in its disciplines to the spark of creativity, cultural insights and access to personal expression are invaluable byproducts. Look beyond the art stars and find your neighbors, every day New Yorkers

whose work is the engine of our city. By strengthening—and increasing!—the arts workforce, you are strengthening the city collectively and individually. We all thrive when the arts thrive. I urge you to support our workers.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Virginia Johnson
Artistic Director Emerita
Dance Theatre of Harlem

Here is your exact 2-minute version, untouched, clean, and ready to copy and paste:

"Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Adelo Ramirez, and ~~I've handed each of yo~~u my proposal for integrating financial literacy into middle and high schools.

New York City needs money, but raising property taxes is not the solution. I agree with Council Member Wong — we should be cutting unnecessary spending, not placing more burden on working families.

The real solution is prevention. And prevention starts with financial literacy. There is no salary big enough if we don't know how to manage money. When we teach financial skills throughout middle and high school, we build habits early. By adulthood, students are prepared for the real world. Right now, most are financially illiterate — and they don't understand the financial stress their parents carry.

Taxing billionaires isn't the answer either. We should be learning from them and inviting them to be role models so our youth don't grow up dependent on government support.

I'm living proof of what financial education can do. In 2011, the SBA under Mayor Bloomberg reached out to me. I told them I needed to learn financials because I had a business with no structure. Within a week, they sent me to Lehman College in the Bronx, where Ms. Lourdes Martinez taught me financials and Excel. That changed my life — and it's the reason I became a finance author.

Once I implemented financial systems in my business, I found my 'why.' And I asked myself why school never taught me this.

We spend about $1.4 million per year for every teen who ends up in detention. My financial literacy workbook would cost the DOE about $16 million to implement citywide. If we prevent just eight kids from entering the system in the first year, the program pays for itself. And if we need help with the initial cost, that's where we can invite billionaires to contribute.

I'm also reaching out to Ms. Oprah Winfrey to explore implementing this workbook in her school in South Africa, because financial literacy should follow every child who needs it.

I understand the push for free bus rides and free college by Mayor, Sanders & AOC, but those are short-term solutions. That's giving someone a fish. Financial literacy teaches our youth how to fish — how to manage money, avoid crime, and move away from government dependency.

Committee Counselors, I welcome your suggestions and feedback. Thank you for your time and for allowing me to speak."

Testimony re: Travel Training
Testimony of Angelia (AJ) Botsaris for New York City Council
Education Budget Hearing

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget—Education

March 23, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Education Budget. My name is AJ Botsaris from Bayside, Queens, and I am a former DOE student with a disability, as well as a member of the Youth Council of the Transition Alliance. I am here to advocate for an increase in funding for travel training, which helps students with disabilities learn the skills needed to navigate public transit and travel independently.

Travel training is currently offered through New York City Public Schools, using one on one instruction to teach students with disabilities how to navigate public transit between their homes and schools while building their sense of confidence and agency.

I was eligible for bus service via the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation from kindergarten to twelfth grade, and between sixth and twelfth grade, I was involved in 3 separate bus accidents. Each time, it took upwards of 2 weeks for that service to resume, and in the interim, our ability to attend school was vastly compromised. OPT would consistently fail to answer phone calls, provide parents with incorrect information, habitually arrive late to student homes and school, and make it near impossible for students to attend school in conditions as simple as heavy rain. For students that solely rely on OPT transport, it would be in their best interest to train them for MTA service; not only will that rectify these situations, but it will provide them with a life skill that will open doors for developing independence.

As a student with an Individualized Education Plan and generalized anxiety disorder, I was promised travel training services upon admission to high school. However, these promises never came to fruition, and due to my irrational but insurmountable fears of MTA transit, it wasn't until senior year that I independently overcame that fear and was able to ride home by myself. I missed out on countless extracurricular activities and was even ridiculed by peers for my inability to independently travel. Travel training is an invaluable skill for students with disabilities that will improve their experiences in DOE schools and empower them to achieve their goals.

I am calling on the City to invest $2M into the expansion of travel training to better serve our students with disabilities. Investing in this service will allow them to travel between home and school, internships and eventually post-secondary education or employment—ultimately, this is a fantastic way to foster independence, agency, self-advocacy and determination within our students.

Thank you for your time.

Barbara Mann
[redacted]
Bklyn - NY 11222
March 23, 2026
[redacted]

I Barbara Mann mother and representative for my son Jonathan Tyler Mann (mentally disabled from Age 4)
My disbled son was a student of Special Education School from Age 4 to 12 yrs.
My mental disabled is almost 20 years never had Education Since age 12 due to Special Education School (District 75) Criminal Misconduct
The school used my son's Social Security number to create fo personal identification. One identification states that my son is illegal and died after he left the city and State in 2018 & a different States. The other one which is natural American citizen was also used as giving to illegal & attend Special Education School and also to obtain government benefit.
Also Special Education School created a Criminal record

(a murderer and rapist) after my son left the school making impossible for him to be accepted in any school in another State. Special Education School used Spiritual school and lead that lead my Son to commit that same evil and criminal act that was put on his record.

However My son is not dead. Whereabouts has been taken from Rikers Island jail without his legal due process. Also he has been taken to undisclosed location that I am NOT aware of. His real passing identification has been given to a transgender and he/she continue to used it on other various agencies with the help of Special Education School. Lastly, My son has no criminal record or ever has any violent behavior since he was teenage-While he was attending the School (middle school) he was introduced to Satanic religion which is not part of Education.

Please I want your comment to help me find the location of my son and also do the constitutional investigation on Special Education School. Thank you

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/23/26

Testimony submitted by:
Chloe Kavanagh
MS-RDN Student, Teachers College, Columbia University
[redacted]

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service, and for all you have done to support Food & Nutrition Education throughout NYC.*

My name is Chloe Kavanagh and I am a MS-RDN Graduate Student at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Through my graduate training, I am developing the skills to support long-term health and disease prevention through nutrition education. As a future Registered Dietitian, I am particularly interested in how early exposure to food and nutrition education can shape lifelong habits and improve health outcomes, especially in underserved communities.

Through my experience with the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, I have had the opportunity to engage with initiatives that support food education across New York City. The Tisch Food Center and Food Ed Coalition play an important role in connecting organizations, supporting educators, and expanding access to nutrition education in schools.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to strengthen Food and Nutrition Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub.

The Food Ed Hub serves as an important resource that helps coordinate efforts across organizations and improves the consistency and reach of nutrition education across schools.

- Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households **($250,000)**.

We implore the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYCPS.

Through my involvement with the Tisch Food Center, I have been able to observe how food education grants support programming in NYC public schools and strengthen collaboration between organizations. It is clear that this funding plays a key role in making nutrition education more accessible and consistent for students.

- Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Additional resources will help

expand programming to more schools each year, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators.

- With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is vital to ensure that this important work continues.

Finally, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers.

From my perspective as a nutrition student, these types of school food service roles are meaningful and align with the kind of work I would be interested in pursuing. However, the current wages make these positions difficult to sustain long-term. This highlights the importance of investing in school food service workers through fair pay and stronger career pathways to attract and retain individuals who are passionate about supporting student nutrition.

- Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.
- A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce would evaluate career pathways, titles, wages, kitchen staff to student ratios, and professional development opportunities.

Thank you for your time,

Chloe Kavanagh

Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Education Hearing
Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget – Travel Training
Daniella Rodriguez
March 23, 2026

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you about the 2027 Preliminary Education Budget. My name is Daniella Rodriguez, and I live in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I am an autism and disability rights advocate here with the New Alternatives for Children (NAC) Youth Council. I am here to discuss travel training and why the City should invest additional funds to make this service available to more students.

Travel training is a beneficial service that is offered by the New York City Department of Education. However, it is not available to every student who needs it. Travel training helps students with disabilities learn to navigate public transportation systems – something that may seem like one skill, but is in fact a constellation of skills. While obvious skills such as planning a route and navigating different subway stations can be a part of travel training, many of us also have to learn things like knowing when it makes sense to change your plan if a train line is running late or there are multiple trains canceled, and being comfortable doing so.

I am autistic, and I also had an IEP while I was in school. While I taught myself how to navigate the subway system, additional support would have helped me with my transition to college, as I have to take the subway on a daily basis to go to college on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. I know that there are many students out there who want to go to college or they want to go to work but feel limited in their options because they are unable to use public transportation. Travel training can encourage independence for students, so they can travel using the right skills and thrive in the world.

It is vital that the city should invest $2M to expand travel training services for students with disabilities. When we invest in travel training, we are investing in their future and their success. Every student should have access to the accommodations and supports they need to succeed.

Thank you.

Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Children and Youth
Committee on Education

Re: FY27 Preliminary Budget – Children and Youth
FY 27 Preliminary Budget – Education

March 16, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support with the proposed budget. Graham has been providing support and services to children and families for 220 years and we are deeply committed to supporting our families and the needs of their school-aged children.
Graham is urging the City to address ongoing gaps in school transportation for students in the foster care system by investing $3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care waiting for bus services to begin.

As the Supervisor of Education Services at Graham for the past 20 years, I know how important it is for students to have reliable school transportation starting as soon as they are placed in foster care or switch foster care placements. For students in foster care, being able to stay at their original school can be a critical source of stability during a very difficult and traumatic time for them. State and federal law recognize the importance of this stability by requiring school districts to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can stay at their original school and maintain their community and cultural bonds. However, it can take weeks or even months for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to arrange bus service—this is a grave disservice to the children.

Here are a few examples demonstrating why the City must provide interim transportation for students in foster care while they wait for bus service: Graham had a foster parent who faced repercussions at work because she had to bring a student to and from school every day while waiting for bus service; Graham agency staff were kept from doing other important work because they spent four hours or more per day transporting students to and from school; and where these troublesome interventions could not be arranged, students were simply unable to use rideshare because there were no adults to accompany them.

While the City offers prepaid rideshare service for students who are waiting for bus service, students must wait *ten school days* without a bus before this service begins. Furthermore, rideshare requires an adult chaperone to ride with the student – a task that is often impossible for foster parents with jobs or other children to manage (as demonstrated above). As a result, many students miss school or are forced to transfer schools even though it is not in their best interest to do so. In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

There are feasible solutions. For example, the City could contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require additional chaperones (such as Kid Car, which operates in NYC); use ACS or other city-owned vehicles that include escorts, as is done for students placed at the Children's Center; launch a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes; hire chaperones-aides to accompany students using rideshare services; or, at

a minimum, reimburse chaperone costs and increase the daily reimbursement cap to cover longer trips and services such as Kid Car.

The City must do more to support the education of students in foster care, including making sure they can get to school in the first place. The City should invest $3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school and a semblance of stability at a critical moment in their lives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

In partnership,

Dawn Grant-Duffus

Dawn Grant-Duffus
Supervisor of Education Services/Youth Development
Fair Futures Middle School Program
Serving Grades 3K to 8
graham - EFFC Program
195 Montague St., 8th fl Brooklyn, NY 11201
[redacted] | Email: Grantd@graham-windham.org
https://www.graham-windham.org | Follow us **@grahamwindham**

Spoken Version

Testimony for the New York City Council
Re: FY2027 Preliminary Budget — Department of Education
March 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Evan Stone. I am a former NYC public school teacher, the founder and CEO of Educators for Excellence — representing over 18,000 NYC teachers — and a parent of a student at PS 9 in Brooklyn. I come to this work as a former teacher, union member, advocate, organizer, and parent, shaped by nearly 20 years working in and alongside NYC public schools.

NYC Reads and NYC Solves are working. In 2024–25, ELA proficiency rose 7.2 points citywide to 56.9%, with Phase 1 schools seeing an 11.6% increase in grades 3–5. Math proficiency rose 3.5 points citywide.[1] Teachers are driving these results — with evidence-based tools and the support to put them to use.

The results are not happening by accident. According to recent surveys of NYC teachers, professional learning is what makes the difference. In NYC Reads, teachers who have not received professional learning at all rate their confidence in teaching students with the greatest needs at the lowest levels across the board.[2] In NYC Solves, teachers who receive effective professional learning are nearly five times more likely to report positive perceptions of student comprehension than those who do not.[3]

In short, professional learning, coaching, and curriculum support are vital to the success and growth of these programs. But right now, the key ingredient behind the gains we're seeing is at risk. The FY2027 preliminary budget does not include dedicated baseline funding for NYC Reads or NYC Solves, and aligned professional learning. This means the philanthropy and year-to-year funding allocations that we're currently relying on will soon expire for a permanent, popular, and evidence-based initiative. It means we are asking teachers to sustain this work without the resources to do it well.

This won't work, especially as the initiatives continue to expand even further due to the success and impact that it's having. In addition to surveying New York City educators this year, we've been conducting focus groups. One educator implementing NYC Solves said, **"...had kids been doing Illustrative Math in elementary, if they had come in knowing all the routines for Illustrative Math, it would have saved me a lot of time at the beginning."**

---

[1] New York State Education Department, "New York State Education Department Releases 2024–25 State Assessment Results," August 2025.
[2] Educators for Excellence–New York, "NYC Reads Educator Survey Results," November 2025.
[3] Educators for Excellence–New York, "NYC Solves Pulse Check Draft Themes," March 2026.

There's an eagerness to expand to these initiatives and build on their successes at other grade levels, but we can't expect to reach our destination without funding the road to get there. We urge this Council to commit $200 million in dedicated, baseline funding for NYC Reads and NYC Solves — funding protected from annual budget fluctuations and providing stability for our schools as they work to grow, sustain, and improve upon these initiatives.

We recognize that this Council is navigating real constraints. The preliminary budget includes approximately $543 million in new city spending next school year to comply with the state class size mandate, scaling to approximately $943 million annually in subsequent years.[4] We support class size reduction — but the research is clear: it works best in early grades and for students with the greatest needs. But reducing class sizes everywhere, before we have funded the programs that are actually moving the needle, has the priorities backwards.

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to secure long-term funding for other essential programs. The programs at stake are serving students now– including students with intensive sensory needs, students at risk of suspension, students who depend on mental health support, and immigrant families who rely on school communications in their home language.[5] **These programs were funded for one year. That year ends in June.**

Smaller classes, strong instruction, and student supports - this Council can and should fund all three. Right now, the budget funds one at the expense of the other two. We are not here to argue against smaller classes. We are here because the budget is on track to commit more than a billion dollars — and potentially far more — to across-the-board class-size reductions, while the programs that are working have no guaranteed funding.

We urge you to commit $200 million in baseline funding for NYC Reads and NYC Solves, and to secure long-term funding for the essential programs at risk of expiring in June.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[4] Chalkbeat New York, February 2026.

[5] Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, City Budget One-Pager, March 2026. Available at https://advocatesforchildren.org/ceef.

Written Version

Written Testimony for the New York City Council
Re: FY2027 Preliminary Budget — Department of Education
March 23, 2026

Good morning, Chair and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Evan Stone. I am a former NYC public school teacher, the founder and CEO of Educators for Excellence — representing over 18,000 NYC teachers — and a proud parent of a student at PS 9 in Brooklyn.

In 2024–25, ELA proficiency rose 7.2 points citywide to 56.9%, with Phase 1 schools seeing an 11.6% increase in grades 3–5. Math proficiency rose 3.5 points citywide.[6] These results are real, and they are the product of teachers doing hard work with evidence-based tools and the professional support to use them well. NYC Reads and NYC Solves are working — and that is precisely why the absence of dedicated baseline funding for these programs in the FY2027 preliminary budget is so troubling.

Asking teachers to sustain and expand this work without the resources to do it well is not a neutral decision. The professional learning, coaching, curriculum support, and family engagement that make these programs work are not incidental costs — they are the mechanism by which instruction changes. **Without baseline funding, we are investing in the destination without funding the road.** We urge the City Council to commit $200 million in dedicated, baseline funding for NYC Reads and NYC Solves — funding protected from annual budget fluctuations.

We recognize that this Council is navigating real constraints. The preliminary budget includes approximately $543 million in new city spending next school year to comply with the state class size mandate, scaling to approximately $943 million annually in subsequent years.[7] The Assembly's one-house budget proposes an additional $600 million in state aid toward the same mandate.[8] We support class size reduction — and the evidence is clear that it works best when targeted to early grades and students with the greatest needs. But large-scale, universal implementation, before we have baselined the programs that put effective instruction in front of every student, reflects a prioritization this Council should examine. Funding for NYC Reads and NYC Solves is not in competition with the goal of smaller classes — both are about giving teachers and students what they need. What is not sustainable is committing billions to class size compliance while leaving the instructional programs that are demonstrably working without a funding floor.

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently

---

[6] NYC Mayor's Office, August 2025.
[7] Chalkbeat New York, February 17, 2026.
[8] New York Focus, March 10, 2026.

funded for this year only, and therefore at risk of significant cuts in July. The programs at stake are serving students now: Learning to Work ($31M), which supports over-age, under-credited students in earning a high school diploma; Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery ($12M) for students with intensive sensory needs; infant/toddler child care seats in high-need communities ($10M); restorative justice programs ($6M) that help students stay in school; the Mental Health Continuum ($5M), which provides mental healthcare to students at 50 schools; early childhood education outreach ($5M); immigrant family communications and outreach ($4M); and Student Success Centers ($3.3M). These programs were funded for one year. That year ends in June.[9]

Strong instruction and strong student supports are not in tension. Funding both is how this Council delivers on its commitment to every student. We urge you to baseline NYC Reads, NYC Solves, and these essential programs in the FY2027 budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[9] Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, City Budget One-Pager, March 2026. Available at https://advocatesforchildren.org/ceef.

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/23/26

Testimony submitted by:

[Irianna Ma]

[Program director, West Harlem Group Assistance Inc]

[Ima@whagainc.org, 212-690-7900]

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, thank you for your service, and for all you have done to support Food & Nutrition Education throughout NYC.

My name is Irianna Ma, and I am the Program Director at West Harlem Group Assistance INC. Our Organization is in the Heart of West Harlem. We feed an Average of 250 individuals daily who are experiencing hunger due to rising food cost, economic instability and loss of benefits. Organizations like the Tisch Food Center & Food Ed Coalition have helped navigate through these trying times with its extensive education program, support meetings and peer discussions with help to navigate through these times.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to strengthen Food and Nutrition Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub. Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households ($250,000).

We implore the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYCPS.

Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Additional resources will help expand programming to more schools each year, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators.

With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is vital to ensure that this important work continues.

Finally, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers.

Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.

A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce would evaluate career pathways, titles, wages, kitchen staff to student ratios, and professional development opportunities.

Thank you for your time,

Irianna Ma

Inventory List	3/19/2026			
	Irianna Ma			
Items				
Boneless Pork Chops (frozen)	Protein	100		
Black Beans (can)	Protein	528		
Black Beans (dry)	Protein	480		
Pinto Beans (can)	Protein	480		
Pinto Beans (dry)	Protein	432		
Small Red Beans	Protein	624		
Blackeye Peas(dry)	Protein	360		
Chulent Mix Beans	Protein	480		
Garbanzo Beans	Protein	312		
Cranberry Beans	Protein	72		
White Navy Beans	Protein	360		
Tomato Sauce	Vegetable	480		
Spinach	Vegetable	144		
Pineapple Tidbits	Fruit	192		
Dried Cranberry	Fruit	3000		
Reganati	Grain	60		
Elbow Macaroni	Grain	600		
Penne Pasta	Grain	40		
Cornmeal	Grain	360		
Quick Oats	Grain	144		
Farina (hot ceral)	Grain	156		
Barley	Grain	192		
White Quinoa	Grain	360		
Cous Cous	Grain	180		
White Rice	Grain	48		
Brown Rice	Grain	240		
Flour	Grain	360		

Testimony Submitted By:
Jacob Duncan, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
Jpd2211@tc.columbia.edu

March 11, 2026

Dear New York City Council,

My name is Jacob Duncan, and I am a graduate student who is studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University as well as a proud New Yorker. I am writing to express my support of the Food ED Coalition's 2026 Policy Priorities, specifically the proposal to expand support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support with Food Ed Programming. As a member of the New York City community I am concerned that when schools close for the summer millions of children throughout the city lose access to nutritious meals. There are over 2 million children who depend on school meals for nutrition that they need to thrive[1]. By expanding the Summer Rising program we can maximize the program's impact and reach.

While I applaud the fact that Summer Rising currently provides breakfast, lunch, and snacks to participating students[2], I believe that more can be done to enhance the program's impact. Currently, fewer than one in four low-income children in the state have access to summer meals[3]. To address this it is important that the structure of the program supports maximum participation. For this goal to be actualized I urge the Council to require that a meal period is included before dismissal or that meals are served followed by instruction. This change will help to ensure that students have consistent access to healthy and nutritious foods year round. By mandating that students receive a dedicated meal before leaving the program the city can guarantee that no student leaves the program on an empty stomach, regardless of their family's circumstances at home.

As a New York City resident I have seen the lack of nutritious options for children during the summer months with children often resorting to fast food options and highly processed snacks from the corner store. This is especially true in neighborhoods like my own, Harlem, where

---

[1]Pelz-Sharpe, F. (2025, July 31). *Building on momentum: Expanding summer nutrition in New York*. NEW YORK. https://state.nokidhungry.org/new-york/building-on-momentum-expanding-summer-nutrition-in-new-york/
[2]*Summer Rising*. NYC Public Schools. (n.d.). https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/summer-rising
[3]Vives, A. (2026, January 14). *Hunger solutions New York responds to 2026 state of the State*. Hunger Solutions New York. https://hungersolutionsny.org/hunger-solutions-new-york-responds-to-2026-state-of-the-state/

parents often do not have the income to give their children money for food or pay for childcare. This initiative would help so that those same children can secure the meals that they need to thrive in the immediate and for the future.

The New York City Council has a clear responsibility to support this initiative as Summer Rising is a direct partnership between New York City Public Schools and the Department of Youth and Community Development[4]. The Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget hearings began month, March 2026[5], making this request especially pertinent.

Thank you for taking the time and for your commitment to the health and success of NYC students. To conclude, ensuring that Summer Rising includes a mandatory meal period before dismissal is a vital step towards building a more equitable food landscape for New York City children. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this policy priority and I am available to discuss this further at the soonest convenience. I can be reached at the email address listed above.

Sincerely,

Jacob Duncan, MS-RDN Candidate Teachers College, Columbia University
Jpd2211@tc.columbia.edu

[4] *Summer Rising*. NYC Public Schools. (n.d.). https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/summer-rising
[5] Financial Division, & Lee, R., Report on the Preliminary Financial Plan for Fiscal Years 2026 - 2030 (2026). New York City , New York.

Hello, my name is Jessica Kurtz and I am a PS889 parent in Brooklyn's District 22, a school that is struggling to meet the class size mandate.

I've been trying my hardest to get an answer on the question of why the enrollment office can send us more Kindergarten kids than our actual capacity allows (and beyond what the class size cap allows).

The enrollment office is sending us three Kindergarten sections of 25 each (when the state law clearly caps at 20 students per classroom and our capacity can in fact only support two sections of 20 each... that's **75 students enrolled vs. 40 true capacity**!) Our funnel is too big and once students reach the upper grades they are eventually consolidated into two overcrowded classrooms as a result. **The enrollment office is basically creating the problem that we then need to fix!**

It's super frustrating and there seems to be little to no transparency or accountability for how those decisions are being made. And our superintendents are deemed powerless- Superintendent Bove reached out to the enrollment office in November to request caps to both our Pre K & our K programs and was denied. Can anyone help us get through to the DOE on this enrollment issue?

There's also no plan in sight for the long term solution, which is that we ultimately need more physical space. I attended a February CEC22 meeting & the SCA gave a presentation- in that presentation they presented the five year capital plan and only two schools in D22 were included in the capacity projects (P206 + PS197). If my math is right, that leaves about 16 D22 schools with insufficient space to lower class size and no budget or plans from the SCA to address it. Including PS889 (and our co-located middle school MS890). And yet luxury builders scoop up prime lots across the street from our school on Coney Island Avenue and Hinckley Place.

I understand the Superintendent is trying to assess opportunities for extensions/ annexes and parents continue to send leads on vacant buildings in the area but these conversations have been going on for years and we still have no concrete space, plan or timeline. **How do we move this forward from good intentions to action**?

My daughter's reading has improved tremendously since the beginning of the school year. I credit this to the individualized attention she has been able to receive (from her fabulous teacher Mrs. Williams!) in her well proportioned class of 19. Now her second grade class is at risk of being collapsed into two sections of ~30 next year. I understand the challenges in meeting this mandate but truly believe it will lead to the best educational outcomes for all students once fully implemented.

Thanks for your time & consideration on this matter.

Jill Rousseau
[redacted]

March 26th 2026

NYC City Council

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to you as a proud parent of a third grader and kindergartener at PS 889 in Brooklyn. It is a wonderful school with dedicated administrators, faculty, staff, and families. It is also extremely overcrowded. When the New York State Legislature passed the Class Size Reduction Law, I was delighted. I was sure that this would positively affect our school.

Years later, not only has there been no meaningful changes to the upper grades, each successive incoming Kindergarten class has class sizes of 25 students, in violation of the law. At the very least, the Office of Enrollment should be reducing the number of kindergarten seats offered. Furthermore, the City Council, the DOE, and the SCA should be working together to reduce class sizes throughout all DOE schools. As parents, we ask for a top-down city-wide plan to fully comply with the law through all possible levers, whether capital construction, eminent domain, renegotiating charter school contracts, or redrawing district and school zone maps.

Sincerely,

Jill Rousseau

My name is Jonathan Lim.

I love nyc parks, and have seen how more funding for Parks in general, and the work of Playfair employees in particular help make this city run.

Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the workforce and do everything from opening key facilities, beautifying our green spaces, to leading education tours on places like Hart Island.

The Parks Department already does so much with so little. If playfair is not renewed, the effects will be felt acutely by other Parks staff and most importantly by the public.

Keep our parks funded, New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Education
Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair
March 23rd, 2026

Testimony during Public Hearing:
Professor Limarys Caraballo
Teachers College, Columbia University
Latinidad Curriculum Initiative Y27 Budget Request: 2.35 M
Delivered by Katie Caster

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, Committee members, and members of the Council,

We are grateful for the City Council's support in our first two years, and for the opportunity to address you all in regards to the request for continued funding for the next and very important phase of this project. We are making a budget proposal request of 2.35M on behalf Teachers College, due to the urgent need to address gaps in access and opportunity among diverse NYC student populations, and the LCI seeks to continue important work by the Council in addressing such inequities.

Although 42% of our city's students identify as having Latine, Latino, or Hispanic heritage, their diverse histories, leadership, and contributions of these students and their families to our City have been under-represented in the curriculum. Recognizing that students learn most effectively by making connections between new information and what they already know, the LCI is grounded in commitments to culturally responsive education, cultural awareness, inclusivity, accessibility, and collaboration as a way to center youth voices and nondominant community perspectives in classroom learning. Our team is uniquely positioned as academic leaders in a partnership that is deeply invested in the learning, achievement, and postsecondary success of *all* students in New York City Public Schools. (As a matter of fact, some of the youth, educators, and administrators who are testifying here today for Black Studies Curriculum and AAPI Curriculum are also partners of LCI, showing how important this work is in uniting the interdisciplinary work that we are all doing across communities and building stronger coalitions in communities of practice.)

<u>In year 1, we led with our expertise and engaged educators, community members, and students as collaborators. Our team worked directly with students and teachers to include multiple</u>

voices in developing the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative conceptual framework and Blueprint, which outlined the vision and scope of the initiative.

The LCI Blueprint is grounded in commitments to culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, transcultural awareness, inclusivity, accessibility, and intergenerational collaboration as a way to center youth voices and nondominant community perspectives in classroom learning. In keeping with our teaching and learning stance, the LCI blueprint depicted in this brochure draws connections between various resources, materials, and stakeholders for ongoing collaboration (Page 1), presents a conceptual framework and design principles for dynamic teaching and learning (Pages 2-3), and illustrates the mapping of sample lessons (Page 3). The blueprint will continue to evolve throughout the design and implementation phases of the project, based on feedback from all stakeholders.

To develop the conceptual framework for this initiative, the LCI project team envisioned broad outcomes related to the rich complexity of Latino cultures, histories, and contributions in New York City. Our conceptual framework is based on a collaborative vision of Latinidad(es) that is grounded in core values and commitments to belonging and community, an intersectional approach to knowledge and teaching, and essential competencies and skills that students should learn, practice, and apply in and beyond school. The four pillars of the conceptual framework are operationalized via the three main design principles that guide the design and planning of curricular and pedagogical resources. In this infographic, each of these design principles is described as it might inform curriculum and pedagogy, followed by possible indicators or sample focal questions that exemplify how each of the principles might be enacted across multiple grade levels and academic disciplines.

In consultation with multiple stakeholders, including youth and community members, we started with these broad goals and used a backward design approach to identify the four main pillars that form our framework–a foundation for all phases of our project, from input to design to implementation. This infographic explains how the relationships between multiple partners and stakeholders throughout the scope of the initiative--from lesson plans, teacher planning guides, and curriculum resources, to an upper division elective course--are all guided by the conceptual framework for a Latinidad Curriculum.

This blueprint is now publicly available on our website, along with our strategic report, which expands on the rationale and research base for the project and the work completed during the first year, both viewed and shared extensively across all boroughs. The blueprint draws connections between the design principles for dynamic teaching and learning in our conceptual framework, and all of the resources and materials that we will curate as part of the project as well as how we will map them to the existing curriculum and standards. The blueprint will continue to evolve throughout the design and implementation phases of the project, based on feedback from all stakeholders.

In Year 2 we implemented our intergenerational collaboration with educators, youth, educators, and communities to develop the curriculum. We enacted this intergenerational vision by engaging educators and students directly in the curriculum design process, and designed a professional development plan to support the implementation of the full curriculum in Year 3. We had an overwhelming response to the open call for student and teacher inquiry groups, with over 300 students and teachers applying to participate. We formed a cohort of 60 students and teachers due to available funding, and this intergenerational cohort supported the current team in developing an elective course full of modules and lessons that will also be available to all high school teachers throughout the five boroughs. We have a teacher and student cohort member here with us today who will share their experiences with you.

Our work with the Student and Teacher Inquiry Groups culminated in a Weekend Institute that provided an opportunity for all inquiry group participants to create stations and co-facilitate engagement with the aspect of the curriculum that they co-developed, in an intergenerational setting. We invited teachers to attend the workshops on Saturday, to encourage engagement with the curriculum and field-test these materials and activities. The commitment to develop this curriculum in full collaboration with youth and community collaborators, as well as educator buy-in, has been realized with the support of City Council and NYCPS partnership thus far.

The full funding of our 2.35M Budget Proposal for Y27 for the Teachers College team will allow us to build upon all of the current innovations. Our team can make the curriculum resources available to all teachers, develop the elementary curriculum, and implement the scalable professional learning plan necessary to support citywide implementation of the Latinidad

Curriculum Initiative throughout New York City by developing interactive online platforms that will make these materials accessible to all teachers and students across the five boroughs, as well as promote critical multimodal literacy skills and competencies that our students really need in order to be competitive in an increasingly globalized economy, with the critical awareness of social and political issues and the sense of agency for civic participation that they really need to make a difference.

We look forward to contributing to the important goals of this committee of making equity, access, and critical hope a reality for all students but especially those who are most underrepresented.

Thank you so much for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dr Limarys Caraballo
Co-Director, Latinidad Curriculum Initiative
Gordon Institute for Advanced Study
Teachers College, Columbia University

Kyle DeAngelis Testimony | Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing | March 23, 2026

Good evening Chair Dinowitz, Councilmember Wong, my name is Kyle DeAngelis. I'm honored to be testifying here tonight, but I have to say I'm even more honored to be a third grade teacher at PS/MS 368 The Bill Lynch School in Harlem.

Unlike the students I have the privilege of teaching, it's safe to say that I'm old enough to remember what it was like in New York City schools way back in 2020 and 2021. In those years, when the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racialized police violence converged, a common refrain emerged in the education world: "we're not going back." That four-word commitment contained boundless promise, the promise that we would not revert to an education system that treats students as numbers on a spreadsheet, but rather we'd build a new system in which trauma-informed care, culturally sustaining practices, and academic excellence would all go hand in hand.

Six years later, that commitment has yet to be realized. This council, working in tandem with the current mayoral administration, has the opportunity to start rectifying that broken promise. The Dignity in Schools campaign, with whom I am testifying today, is calling for a number of budgetary investments that would transform our schools into the safe and just schools our students deserve:

- $80 million to hire School Climate Coordinators in 500 priority middle and high schools
- Baseline the remaining $6 million in restorative justice funding set to expire, and increase funding by another $5 million, bringing the total from $17.6 million to $22.6 million, including the addition of :
    - $2 million for training and technical assistance, and
    - $3 million to support paid student leadership opportunities in restorative justice.

By freezing hiring for School Safety Agents, eliminating vacancies, and not backfilling through attrition, the City can save up to $90 million in one year to reinvest in these priorities.

Additionally we're also calling on the City Council to protect immigrant students and families by:

- Strengthening immigration preparedness policies;
- Offering comprehensive trainings for NYCPS staff, students, and families;
- Enhancing data privacy; and
- Passing Intro 798 to eliminate the NYPD's Gang database.

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/23/26

Testimony submitted by:
Lindsey Smith
MS-RDN Student at Teachers College, Columbia University
[redacted]

Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service, and for all you have done to support Food & Nutrition Education throughout NYC.*

My name is Lindsey Smith and I am an intern at The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy as well as a M.S. Student in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The Tisch Food Center profoundly contributes to food and nutrition education across New York City, leveraging findings from our research to deliver recommendations, relevant tools, and curricula for programming. We also facilitate collaboration between policymakers, community members, schools, and nutrition education providers in order to ensure the implementation of effective and impactful nutrition education. Our mission is to amplify the voices, needs and impact of food and nutrition education, translate our research into tangible recommendations for policy and practice, and support NYC's most vulnerable populations by way of advocating for healthier school environments.

My internship at the Tisch Food Center has granted me the opportunity to actively contribute to research that aims to refine current nutrition education programming across NYC. This experience has illuminated where barriers currently lie and the collaborative efforts that it will take to address them. As a member of the Food Ed Coalition, we communicate up-to-date research and brainstorm innovative ways to improve the nutritional health and well-being of children through nutrition education and sustainable, culturally-responsive, healthy school food with nutrition education providers, school community members, and stakeholders.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to strengthen Food and Nutrition Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub.

As a future dietitian, I recognize the necessity and urgency of effective food and nutrition education in schools, a mission to which the Food Ed Hub is dedicated. Using evidence-backed tools and assessments to create curricula, the Food Ed Hub makes significant contributions to ensuring food and nutrition education is as accessible, current, and relevant as possible.

- Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households **($250,000)**.

We implore the council to expand access to grants for Food & Nutrition Education for NYCPS.

Through my position at the Tisch Food Center, I organize data gathered from food and nutrition education providers in NYC public schools to identify the changes programming has undergone in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they can be augmented to strengthen the effectiveness and reach of nutrition education. Out of the surveyed organizations providing nutrition education, 41% reported a limited funding pool as an extreme barrier, signaling that there is great need for further monetary support.

- Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 456 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Additional resources will help expand programming to more schools each year, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators.

- With the loss of Federal SNAP-Ed, increased grant funding for food and nutrition education is vital to ensure that this important work continues.

Finally, we call on the council to invest in School Food Service Workers.

- Adequate staffing and livable wages are needed to support school kitchen staff. With these systems in place, efforts to enhance school meal quality, food security, and food ed will be more effective.
- A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce would evaluate career pathways, titles, wages, kitchen staff to student ratios, and professional development opportunities.

Thank you for your time,

Lindsey Smith

Class Size Testimony to NY City Council, March 23, 2026 Michael Ekstract, public school parent

Good afternoon. My name is Michael Ekstract, and I am Co-President of the Parent Association at The Clinton School, a highly sought-after 6–12 public school in Manhattan's District 2.

I'm here to share a simple reality: **schools like Clinton cannot meet the new class size mandate under current conditions.** Not because we don't support it—but because it is not physically or operationally feasible.

At Clinton, many classes have as many as **34 students**. The school has explored every option—reconfiguring space, adding classrooms, adjusting schedules. But the conclusion is clear: **without reducing enrollment or adding significant new space, compliance is not possible.**

So we need to be honest about the tradeoffs.

There are only a few viable paths:
reduce enrollment at over-capacity schools, or expand into additional space.

But there is another critical issue:
school funding is tied to enrollment.

If you reduce the number of students without adjusting funding, you are asking schools to do more with less. That is also a setup for failure.

I understand that some families oppose reducing seats at popular schools. But if we are serious about smaller class sizes—and about equity—we cannot maintain the status quo and expect different results.

And this matters for students.

Large classes make it harder to **attract and retain excellent teachers**, and harder to meet the needs of increasingly diverse classrooms following the shift to lottery-based admissions.

Larger classes plus greater learning diversity make differentiated instruction extremely difficult.

If the DOE is committed to equity, it must align class size goals with **enrollment, space, and funding.**

I urge the Council to require a school-level implementation plan that does exactly that.

If we want smaller classes, we have to make the structural decisions that allow them to exist. Otherwise, we are setting schools up to fail at something we all agree matters.

Thank you.

Michelle Lew
MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

March 11, 2026

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

My name is Michelle Lew, and I am a student at Teachers College, Columbia University studying nutrition. I am writing to advocate for stronger support for food and nutrition education in New York City by strengthening the city's Food Education infrastructure mainly through sustained investment in the Food Ed Hub and Coalition and greater support for community-based organizations providing food education.

Food and nutrition education plays a crucial role in improving public health and helping individuals develop lifelong healthy eating habits. Research indicates how nutrition education programs can improve dietary behaviors such as increasing fruit and vegetable intake and reducing sugar intake (Contento, 2008). Access to culturally relevant and community-based nutrition can be a powerful tool to help families gain knowledge and skills needed to make healthier food choices and improve overall well-being. However, there are still many communities across New York City, especially in low-income neighborhoods, that have limited access to high-quality food education resources (Young, et al., 2023).

Sustaining the Food Ed Hub and Coalition is crucial for strengthening food education efforts across the city. Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub would support collaboration between food education providers and assist with coordination efforts to expand nutrition education programs for vulnerable communities. Maintaining this network allows organizations to develop better practices, share resources, and advocate for policies that improve food access and security. Continued investment in this initiative would help ensure that individuals who face food insecurity have access to the food education resources necessary to support healthier lives.

Additionally, developing a strategic framework for the Food Ed Coalition would help guide its long term growth. Having support from an outside adviser would help the coalition develop a strategic plan that aligns with community-based organizations' goals providing food education across NYC. This would help reinforce cooperation among organizations, as well as improve effectiveness of food education initiatives aimed at addressing New York City's recurring issue of nutrition insecurity.

Investing more in Food Ed programs would also help lengthen the extent of nutrition education services. Increasing funding for food education programming would open up more opportunities for community-based organizations to deliver nutrition education programs within communities who lack access to these types of resources. Nutrition education programs that involve hands-on food skills have been demonstrated to improve diet and strengthen healthier eating patterns (de Oliveira Andrade, et al., 2025). I currently work with Edible Schoolyard to deliver hands-on food skills to students and have seen firsthand how experimenting with different foods helps students understand where the food they eat comes from and different cooking methods.

Investing in program evaluation would allow organizations to better measure the effectiveness of food education initiatives. Providing organizations with evaluation tools would allow policymakers to identify successful strategies and ensure that funding is supporting programs that effectively improve nutrition knowledge across the city. Strengthening and expanding Food Ed initiatives through sustained funding, strategic planning, and support for community organizations would help ensure that more New York City residents have access to

nutrition education. I strongly urge the New York City Council to prioritize these investments to strengthen food education infrastructure across New York City.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to addressing food insecurity in New York City. I am looking forward to hearing back from the committee.

Sincerely,
Michelle Lew MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
ml5303@tc.columbia.edu

References:

Contento, I. (2008). Nutrition education: linking research, theory, and practice. *Asia Pac J Clin Nutr*, *17*(1), 176–179. https://apjcn.qdu.edu.cn/17_5_38.pdf

de Oliveira Andrade, E. D., Silva Freitas, É. P., do Nascimento, D. de S. M., Jomori, M. M., Passos, T. S., Piuvezam, G., & Maciel, B. L. L. (2025). Can the development of cooking skills influence nutritional status and diet in healthy adults? A systematic review and meta-analysis protocol. *PLOS One*, *20*(6), e0325947. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0325947

Young, A. O., Brown, A., Collins, T. A., & Glanz, K. (2023). Food insecurity, Neighborhood Food environment, and Health disparities: State of the science, Research Gaps and Opportunities. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, *119*(3), 850–861. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajcnut.2023.12.019

New York City Council

Committee on Education

March 23, 2026

FISCAL YEAR 2027 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING

Testimony of Naveed Hasan, NYCPS Parent and Member of the Panel for Educational Policy

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Naveed Hasan. I am a public school parent and a member of the Panel for Educational Policy. I am here to close our panel's testimony by translating the challenges my colleagues described into the concrete policy and budget solutions this Council must lead.

As you have heard from Yasmin, Jon, and Aracelis, our immigrant and ELL students face a crisis of both safety and service. When a parent is afraid to take their child to school, or a student lacks legally mandated ENL support, the City fails its promise of a sound, basic education.

To address these gaps, we urge the Council to prioritize the following in the FY27 Budget:

First, we must codify safety through inter-agency collaboration. Informal DOE policies are insufficient. We need a coordinated approach—including the NYPD, MTA, and yellow bus vendors—to ensure students are protected while traveling to school, on field trips, and during afterschool activities. We ask the Council to enshrine expanded guidance regarding interactions with non-local law enforcement into local law.

Second, this must be supported by funding for mandatory training. We must ensure that every adult interacting with our students—from principals to bus drivers—knows exactly how to maintain a true sanctuary environment.

Finally, we must bridge the instructional gap with an $8 million investment. We are calling for the creation of the **ELL Instructional Specialist** role. This funding would pilot the position in 50 high-need schools, providing the specialized pedagogical coaching that our overstretched teachers and immigrant families desperately need.

Immigrant students are stabilizing our enrollment and represent the future of our city. That future depends on the actions taken in this budget. New York City must ensure students feel safe entering our schools and receive the high-quality education they deserve once inside.

Thank you.

Testimony Submitted By:
Roxanne Diaz Caceres, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

March 11, 2026

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

My name is Roxanne Diaz Caceres, and I am a graduate student studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to urge the New York City Council to increase funding and support for community gardens and food education programs in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. These investments are essential for supporting the health and well-being of the communities who perform much of the essential work that keeps New York City running—many of whom are Latine, immigrants, and people of color.

This issue is deeply personal to me. I am both the daughter of an immigrant and an immigrant myself. My mother worked multiple low-wage jobs to support our family and help me access opportunities that she never had, including higher education in the US. When I first moved to the United States, I lived for a couple years in a low-income Latine community in Hialeah, Florida. Living there helped me understand the barriers many families face when trying to access healthy food and nutrition resources. Because of my mother's sacrifices, I was fortunate to have access to nutritious meals. However, I know that many children growing up in communities like the one I lived in—and like Sunset Park today—do not have the same access. When I work with students in these neighborhoods, I see myself in them.

Through my work with Seeds in the Middle, I have seen firsthand how community gardens and food education programs can empower young people. Programs that teach students how to grow food, cook nutritious meals, and understand their food systems give them tools that can shape their health for life. Nutrition education is powerful because knowledge is power. But knowledge alone is not enough. We cannot expect families to make healthier choices if we do not also provide a strong safety net and access to nutritious food in their neighborhoods. Food is a basic human need.

Research shows that community gardens and urban agriculture initiatives can increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, strengthen community connections, and improve food security in underserved neighborhoods (Algert et al., 2016). In communities like Sunset Park, where many residents are essential workers and immigrants, these gardens can serve as critical sources of fresh produce and culturally relevant foods. They also create safe community spaces where children can learn about nutrition, sustainability, and food systems.

At the same time, neighborhoods like Sunset Park are saturated with fast food chains and limited healthy food options. Studies have consistently shown that low-income communities and communities

Algert, S. J., Diekmann, L., Renvall, M. J., & Gray, L. (2016). Community and home gardens increase vegetable intake and food security of residents in San Jose, California. California Agriculture, 70(2), 77–82. https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2016a0001

Powell, L. M., Chaloupka, F. J., & Bao, Y. (2007). The availability of fast-food and full-service restaurants in the United States: Associations with neighborhood characteristics. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 33(4), S240–S245. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2007.07.005

Seeds in the Middle. (n.d.). https://seedsinthemiddle.org/

of color are disproportionately exposed to unhealthy food environments (Powell et al., 2007). If New York City is serious about improving public health and reducing health disparities, we must address this imbalance. Supporting community gardens and limiting the concentration of fast food establishments in vulnerable neighborhoods would help create healthier food environments for children and families.

The New York City Council has both the responsibility and the opportunity to support the communities that sustain our city. Many Sunset Park residents work long hours in service, transportation, healthcare support, construction, and food industries. Investing in community gardens, urban agriculture programs, and food education initiatives is one way to honor their contributions while promoting equity and health for the next generation.

As someone who grew up in a working-class immigrant community, I believe deeply that every child deserves access to healthy food and the opportunity to learn how to nourish themselves and their families. By expanding funding for community gardens and strengthening policies that improve neighborhood food environments, the New York City Council can help ensure that children in Sunset Park—and across New York City—have the same opportunities to thrive that my mother worked so hard to give me.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New York City's communities.

Sincerely,

Roxanne Diaz Caceres
MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Algert, S. J., Diekmann, L., Renvall, M. J., & Gray, L. (2016). Community and home gardens increase vegetable intake and food security of residents in San Jose, California. California Agriculture, 70(2), 77–82. https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2016a0001

Powell, L. M., Chaloupka, F. J., & Bao, Y. (2007). The availability of fast-food and full-service restaurants in the United States: Associations with neighborhood characteristics. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 33(4), S240–S245. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2007.07.005

Seeds in the Middle. (n.d.). https://seedsinthemiddle.org/

Ruth Aguirre
[redacted]
03/23/2026
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education
The New York City Council - Committee on Education

Good afternoon. Buenas tardes, Chair Dinowitz, Committee members, and members of the Council.

My name is Ruth Aguirre. I am a teacher at P.S. 189 in the heart of Washington Heights, a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, and a curriculum contributor to the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative (LCI).

I testify today on the transformative power of the Latinidad curriculum for NYC students and families.

New York City's history thrives on the contributions of diverse people. When students see their communities' achievements reflected in lessons, it affirms their identity and builds self-efficacy. At LCI's Talleres en Comunidad workshops, high school students gained new knowledge of Latino culture, sparking gratitude for seeing people from their communities represented. The students also sought advice on their educational and career aspirations, as most of the presenters were graduate students and leaders in professional fields, also of Latino heritage, who could relate to their experiences. These connections during students' formative years provide a foundation for self-efficacy and plans for a successful future in New York City and beyond.

Latinidad topics also boost engagement and critical thinking. At my school, where 93% of students are Hispanic—many of them of Dominican heritage—music lessons from Latin America ignite excitement. Students compare and contrast rhythms, share family stories, and create new lyrics. These innovative students are in the process of becoming the next wave of New York City cultural and thought leaders.

In closing, the Latinidad curriculum serves as a mirror for students who see themselves represented in it and a window for others seeking to learn more about the people in their world. It celebrates Latino art, music, stories, and resilience, enriching all New Yorkers. When New York City shows support for this in our schools, the message is clear: our students' cultures are important, celebrated, and essential to our city's future. Let us all commit to supporting the Latinidad curriculum. Thank you.

Written Submission Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

FY2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 23, 2026

Sasha Spizer, Union College — In support of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding

---

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Sasha Spizer Union College, Class of 2028 — Economics and Sociology Seward Fellow, Special Education Funding Equity Research Testifying in support of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding

I submit this statement in support of increased investment in special education service delivery in the FY2027 budget.

Personal experience. I went through most of high school with an undiagnosed neurodevelopmental condition. My grades plummeted during COVID-19, compounded by significant family health crises. I was seen as a failing student. When my family pursued neuropsychological testing, the wait was over a year. When I was finally diagnosed and received the right support, everything changed. I am now an honors research fellow studying special education funding equity in New York City. The right support transformed my life. But the pathway to that support — the long wait for testing, the years without a diagnosis — should not depend on circumstance.

What the data shows. I appreciate that the Mayor's Preliminary Budget extends and baselines last year's $70 million investment in preschool special education services, evaluations, and staffing. But even with this funding, NYCPS has been unable to fully meet its legal obligations to students with disabilities. More than 7,500 school-aged students ended the 2024–25 school year still waiting for legally mandated speech therapy to begin. More than 6,600 were waiting for occupational therapy. More than 5,400 were waiting for counseling. More than 650 were waiting for physical therapy. The UFT has documented over 2,200 special education vacancies across nearly 474 schools, including 1,558 paraprofessional vacancies. Instead of building the workforce to fill these gaps, the city relies on 141 active private contracts at a cost of nearly $900 million — a revolving door of contractors that does not provide the consistency children with disabilities need.

Coalition's agenda: I support the full agenda of the *Coalition for Equitable Education Funding*, from sustaining expiring programs like the Mental Health Continuum and Learning to Work to making schools physically accessible. But I want to focus on the issue I know firsthand.

What I ask. I support Advocates for Children's recommendation that the Council invest at least $100 million to address the shortage of service providers and fulfill the city's legal obligation to students with disabilities across all grade levels. This funding should prioritize hiring additional NYCPS service providers, adding per-session service slots for speech therapy and ninth-session slots for occupational and physical therapy so in-house providers can serve more students during the school day, and increasing Related Service Authorization reimbursement rates so families who receive RSA vouchers can actually find providers willing to accept them. The Council should also extend the enhancements from the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations, to help address the class shortage.

Beyond funding levels. Funding alone will not close the gap if nobody delivers the services. The special education staffing crisis is driven by low pay for paraprofessionals, prohibitive certification pathways from paraprofessional to teacher, and working conditions that drive turnover. The FY2027 budget should invest not only in hiring but in retention and pipeline development — so the city builds a stable workforce rather than cycling through contractors.

As federal oversight of special education recedes, the city's responsibility to meet its own legal obligations becomes more urgent. Children with disabilities have a legal right to timely evaluations and services. This budget should reflect that.

Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

FY2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 23, 2026

Sasha Spizer, Union College — Testifying in support of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Sasha Spizer. I'm a sophomore at Union College studying economics and sociology, and I'm here today in support of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding.

I want to tell you what it's like to be the student the system almost misses.

I went through most of high school undiagnosed with ADHD and a related neurodevelopmental condition. My grades plummeted. I was seen as a failing student, not a struggling one. When my family pursued neuropsychological testing, the wait was over a year. By the time I was diagnosed and received the right support, I had lost years I can't get back.

The right support changed everything for me. I'm now an undergraduate research fellow studying special education funding equity in New York City. But I think about the kids who don't get what I did. The ones still waiting.

The numbers tell you what that waiting looks like. I appreciate that the Preliminary Budget baselines last year's $70 million investment in preschool special education. But even with that funding, the city still can't meet its legal obligations. Last year, more than 7,500 school-aged students ended the year still waiting for legally mandated speech therapy. More than 6,600 were waiting for occupational therapy. More than 5,400 were waiting for counseling. There are over 2,200 special education vacancies across nearly 500 schools. And the city spent nearly $900 million on private contracts for therapists it can't hire. Families with the resources to navigate the system get their children served. Families without them, wait.

I'm here to support Advocates for Children's recommendation that the Council invest at least $100 million to address the provider shortage and fulfill the city's legal obligation to students with disabilities across all grade levels — by hiring NYCPS providers, expanding service slots so in-house staff can reach more students, and raising RSA reimbursement rates so families who receive vouchers can actually find someone to accept them.

In addition to the coalition's recommendations, I want to name what the budget numbers don't fully capture. Even when funding exists, services don't reach children if there's nobody to deliver them. The staffing crisis in special education is a service delivery crisis. Paraprofessionals leave because the pay is too low, and because certification pathways are too long and too expensive. Schools rely on a revolving door of contractors instead of building the stable workforce that children with disabilities need.

The pathway from "something is wrong" to "here is your support" should not depend on which family you're born into. That's what this budget can start to fix.

Thank you.

Testimony on March 23, 2026, to the Education Committee jointly with the Committee on Civil and Human Rights of the New York City Council by Shari Wejsa-Stewart on the contribution of the team at Teachers College, Columbia University led by Dr. Regina Cortina, to the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative and how this work is advancing diversity and equity in NYC Public Schools.

Oral Testimony:

Good afternoon, my name is Shari Wejsa-Stewart, and I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University and former high school social studies teacher. I am speaking on behalf of the team led by Dr. Regina Cortina that has been working on the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative. This initiative is a citywide effort to develop a culturally responsive curriculum and professional learning for New York City Public Schools, reflecting the histories, identities, and contributions of Latino communities. I am here to testify to what we accomplished in our second year and to ask for funding next year to continue this crucial work.

Over the past academic year, we have written twenty lessons for grades 6–9 structured around our four pedagogical pillars, which together foster inclusive, interdisciplinary, and student-centered learning. We have also created a cohort of 20 teachers from multiple districts who have been writing additional lesson plans to support the curriculum. This year we held nine curriculum writing sessions, guiding teachers from planning and standards alignment to assessment and differentiation so they could design lessons that reflect students' identities and experiences.

To support professional learning of New York City educators to implement this curriculum, we hosted a series of Knowledge Building Workshops bringing together teachers, scholars, and school leaders to explore how Latinidad can be taught across disciplines. In October, participants examined Afro-Latinidad and intersectional identities. In November, workshops focused on narratives of Latinidad in New York City, including immigration and activism. In January, educators explored the role of music and arts in deepening students' understanding of identity and community. And in March, teachers worked with our team to translate these ideas into classroom-ready lessons on activism, history, and community well-being, such as exploring how community gardens serve as spaces of cultural preservation, resilience, and collective care.

Teachers' responses have been overwhelmingly positive, with many requesting more workshops. One described a session as *"a rich and powerful workshop… with insights I will use to prepare ideas for learning,"* while another called the work *"groundbreaking… healing the inner childhood of many Latin@ people who have not been represented for so long."*

This work is building a strong foundation: not just new materials, but a growing community of culturally responsive educators.

Thank you.

Supporting Explanation of Year 2 Progress and Year 3 Goals and Budget Request

Dear Committee Chairs,

For two years, the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative has contributed to addressing inequalities in access to quality education for all students. We do this by offering curriculum, resources, and professional development to help teachers recognize who their students are and the strengths of the communities they belong to. Our goal, following the goal of the New York City Council, is to enhance school experiences for children and youth of all backgrounds so that they persist through graduation and on to college. By providing a framework that helps learners of all ages understand and appreciate the histories, cultures, and valuable contributions of Latinas and Latinos, this curriculum will deepen students' academic interest and engagement from these communities.

Over the past year, the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative team at the Edmund W. Gordon Institute for Advanced Study at Teachers College, Columbia University, has continued to make significant strides in developing a curriculum responsive to Latino communities' needs and goals to close the academic achievement gap. Building on the foundation of our four pedagogical pillars: Belonging, Critical Skills Across Contexts, Multiple Ways of Knowing, and Dynamic and Inquiry-Based Learning, our team has deepened its work by writing twenty lessons for 6th to 9th grade. Additionally, guided by the research conducted in the first year, we worked to expand professional learning opportunities for educators committed to this by offering building knowledge workshops, launching the first cohort of teacher curriculum writing workshops, and piloting lesson materials across New York City Public Schools.

In our second year of funding, we organized a series of four Knowledge Building Workshops at Teachers College, Columbia University, inviting teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders to engage with scholars specializing in fields central to our curriculum, from

Afro-Latinx history to music and arts education. These sessions deepened educators' content knowledge and ability to build meaningful connections with other valuable curricular materials, such as the Passport to Social Studies, Hidden Voices, and the Black Studies Curriculum. Most importantly, educators and leaders built networks of support by engaging in professional discussions about the practical resources needed to bring Latinidad into their classrooms in multidisciplinary, grade-appropriate ways.

The first workshop, *Centering Afro-Latinidad in New York City*, introduced participants to our Latinidad conceptual framework while centering the intersectional experiences of Afro-Latinx students. The second workshop, *Narratives of Latinidad in New York City*, offered a literacy-based path to approach nuclear thematic areas in the study of Latinidad, including immigration and community formation, transnationalism and labor movements, political mobilizations, and the politics of representation in US arts and media. The third workshop, *Sounds of Latinidad: Integrating Music and Arts Education* into the K-12 Curriculum, explored the potential of arts and music education to complement the study of Latinidad across grades and content areas, elevating the presence of artists and cultural institutions active in New York City's ecosystem that sustain musical traditions and foster spaces for cultural expression. The fourth workshop, *Lessons for the Study and Celebration of Latinidad*, was facilitated by members of the LCI Team and engaged participants directly with sample activities and lesson plans developed for grades 6th to 9th, including lessons on Activism in NYC Public Schools: Fighting for Bilingual Education and Community Control; Cigar Factories and Revolutionary Activities: The Foundation of Afro-Latinidad in NYC; and Cultivating Well-being & Solidarity: Community Gardens and Latinidad in NYC.

Additionally, we selected a cohort of 20 teachers from seven districts across Manhattan, the Bronx, and Queens to participate in nine Curriculum Writing Sessions to be held between October 2026 and June 2027. These sessions provided structured professional learning and implementation support, enabling teachers to design, pilot, and refine curriculum lessons that meet student needs while building effective instructional practices. Our sessions combined rigorous professional learning aligned with district leaders' goals and included topics such as pre-classroom planning and standards alignment through lesson design, differentiation for students with disabilities and newcomer students, and community and participatory approaches, concluding with a session for reflection and celebration of teachers' work across the year.

During the third year of funding, we plan to move the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative forward by:

1. Piloting the 20 completed lessons for grades 6–9 with the teachers members of our community of practice, gathering structured feedback from a team of 20 teachers across Districts 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 27, and 30 to refine lessons for broader implementation.
2. Recruiting and onboarding a new cohort of 20 teachers to join our curriculum writing team for grades 1–5, in a group with representation from all boroughs.
3. Developing 20 new multidisciplinary lesson plans for grades 1–5 with the existing core writing cohort, maintaining continuity with the Latinidad conceptual framework, and ensuring coherence across grade bands.
4. Deepening professional learning through four new knowledge-building workshops at Teachers College, two in Fall 2026 and two in Spring 2027, featuring expert-led sessions on pedagogical inquiry, implementation strategies, and scaling the Latinidad curriculum.

5. Preparing four curriculum resource guides to accompany the knowledge-building workshops, and collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data across all Year 3 activities to produce an evaluation report with recommendations for Year 4.

Thank you, New York City Council, for all your support in building a curriculum to help our communities learn from their histories in this wonderful city.

Dear City Council Members,

I have been working in Learning to Work (LTW) programs since 2010, and I can say without hesitation that this program changes lives.

I've seen young people walk into our programs carrying the weight of everything life has thrown at them-over-age, under-credited, disconnected, and often believing that graduation was no longer possible. Many of them didn't just need academic support; they needed someone to listen, someone to believe in them, and someone to help them find their way again.

LTW does exactly that.

I have personally worked with students who were struggling with depression and suicidal ideation, who felt invisible in traditional school settings, and who had every reason to give up, but didn't, because of the relationships and support they found through LTW. I've watched students who were once counted out walk across the graduation stage, reconnect with purpose, and build real postsecondary plans for their future.

This program is not just about credits or diplomas. It is about restoring hope.

LTW creates spaces within transfer schools that are designed to support young people who have fallen behind; not just academically, but emotionally and socially. Through career exploration, internships, counseling, and consistent mentorship, students begin to see themselves differently. They gain confidence. They build skills. They start to believe that their future matters.

And the results speak for themselves.

We know that students in transfer schools with LTW support are significantly more likely to graduate. We know that interns graduate at dramatically higher rates. But behind those numbers are real stories, students who are now in college, working meaningful jobs, supporting their families, and contributing to their communities.

For nearly two decades, LTW has been a proven, data-backed intervention that has helped lower dropout rates across New York City. It has strengthened the workforce pipeline and created safer, more supportive school environments where young people can thrive.

But right now, this program is at risk.

The potential loss of $31 million in funding is not just a budget issue, it is a direct threat to the futures of thousands of young people. Without this funding, students will lose access to critical supports that we know work.

At the same time, the current RFP raises serious concerns. If not aligned with what we know LTW looks like at its best, we risk weakening a model that has been incredibly successful in reaching and supporting the hardest-to-serve youth.

We cannot afford to get this wrong.

Stabilizing LTW funding is essential. It protects graduation gains, strengthens our workforce, and prevents far greater long-term social and economic costs. Most importantly, it ensures that young people who have already faced so many barriers are not left without the support they need to succeed.

I have dedicated over a decade of my life to this work because I have seen the impact up close. I have seen lives change. I have seen hope restored.

We must protect and invest in Learning to Work, not just for today, but for the future of our city.

#SaveLTW

With Hope,

Shawn Henry

My name is Tamika Mapp. I am a mother, a community advocate, and the District Leader for the 68th Assembly District, Part D.

I stand here today representing working families who are doing everything right—but are being failed by systems that were not designed with them in mind.

Let me be clear: our early childhood and education system is not working for working families—and it is certainly not working for the people who hold it together every single day.

First, we must talk about paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals are the backbone of our classrooms. They support our children with the greatest needs—academically, emotionally, and physically. Yet, they are some of the lowest-paid workers in our education system.

We cannot continue to say we value our children while underpaying the very people who care for them.

If we are serious about education, then we must be serious about increasing paraprofessional wages to a true living wage—not small increases, but real salaries that allow them to live in the communities they serve.

Second, before and after school care for our youngest learners—our 2K and 3K students—is not optional. It is essential.

Working parents do not work school hours. They work real hours—early mornings, late evenings, multiple jobs. When we expanded 2K and 3K, we did not build a system that reflects the reality of working families.

And that gap is falling on parents—forcing impossible choices between keeping their jobs and caring for their children.

We need universal, accessible before and after school care for our youngest learners. Period.

And finally, we must address what happened to family childcare providers.

For years, working parents relied on family childcare workers—trusted providers in their own communities who offered flexible, culturally competent care.

But instead of investing in them, we pulled children out of those settings and pushed them into school systems that were not prepared to absorb them.

Now we have overcrowded classrooms, families without flexible care, and childcare providers struggling to survive.

That is not progress—that is displacement.

We must reinvest in family childcare providers and ensure they are paid a living wage. They are not a backup system—they are essential infrastructure.

If we want a system that actually works, we must stop making decisions that sound good and start making decisions that work in real life.

Invest in paraprofessionals.
Fund before and after school care.
Pay family childcare providers what they deserve.

Because when we support the people who care for our children, we are investing in the future of our entire community.

Thank you.

Tamika Mapp

[redacted]

[redacted]

Written Testimony to the City Council on the Education Budget Date: March 23, 2026

My name is Tiffany Rodriguez, and I am a parent and active member of the RSMA community. I am submitting this testimony to express the urgent need for equitable education funding for schools serving low-income communities, including RSMA, where students and families rely on strong public investment to access the opportunities they deserve.

RSMA is now facing the loss of the entire middle school after years of neglect and insufficient support from the district. Schools in lower-income communities should not be set up to struggle due to lack of resources, and then labeled as failing without first being given the investments necessary to succeed. Sustainable improvement requires meaningful support, not disinvestment.

At RSMA, families were not clearly informed that we had the right to be involved in decisions regarding Title I funding. Without that knowledge, our community was not given a fair opportunity to advocate for programs and supports that could have strengthened our school. Families cannot be true partners in education when we are not fully informed or meaningfully included in decisions that directly affect our children.

While Title I is federally funded, the City Council plays a critical role in ensuring schools in lower-income neighborhoods receive the resources necessary to provide equitable educational opportunities. Our students need targeted investments that support both academic achievement and whole-child development.

I respectfully urge the City Council to prioritize funding for:

• Support for students with IEPs and diagnosed learning differences, including increased access to specialists, intervention services, and classroom supports that ensure students with disabilities receive the services they are legally entitled to.

• Black Studies curriculum and culturally responsive programming, which helps students see themselves reflected in their education, strengthens engagement, and supports positive academic outcomes.

• Arts programming, including music, visual arts, theater, and creative enrichment opportunities that are too often limited in under-resourced schools, yet are essential to student expression, confidence, and academic success. Our children should not have to choose between strong academics and the arts — both are essential to a well-rounded, meaningful education.

Schools like RSMA should not lose an entire middle school after years without equitable investment. When schools in lower-income communities are not given the same level of support as schools in more affluent areas, the long-term impact is felt not only by individual students, but by entire communities.

Our families want to be partners in our children’s education. With transparent communication and thoughtful budget investments, the City Council can help ensure that students in schools like RSMA have access to the resources, stability, and opportunities they deserve.

Our children deserve strong schools, supportive services, and enriching programs that allow them to reach their full potential.

Respectfully,

Tiffany Rodriguez RSMA Parent

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charles Heun

Address: [redacted] Columbus blvd

I represent: Transportation Alternatives

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer Wang

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Transportation Alternatives (Student)

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: August Lloyd

Address: [redacted] Clarkson Avenue

I represent: Transportation Alternatives (Student)

Address: [redacted] 111 John St

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophie Stelbaum

Address: _____

I represent: The Trust for Public Land

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charles Flavin

Address: [redacted]

I represent: A Youth Committee

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/21/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SANDRA MITCHELL

Address: _____

I represent: PARENT ACTION COMMITTEE / DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Juniper Ward

Address: [redacted]

I represent: TA Youth Committee

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: August Hoyt

Address: [redacted]

I represent: TA Youth Committee

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3123126

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hailey Ortiz

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Art Educ' Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Virginia Johnson

Address: [redacted] W57St NYC

I represent: myself, DNTC, Dance Teacher

Address: of Harlem

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ruth Aguirre

Address: _____

I represent: Teachers College (TCI) Latinidad Curriculum

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Ekstract 3/23/26

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Louisa Toy

Address: [redacted] Midwood St

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan Nordgren

Address: [redacted]

I represent: New York Sun Works

Address: 157 Columbus Ave, NY, NY 10023

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

teacher

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eva Gray

Address: _____

I represent: Dignity in Schools - NY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abigail Segura

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 23, 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yainel Beltre

Address: _____

I represent: Hispanic Federation

Address: 55 Exchange Pl New York, NY 10005

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kaede Nardi

Address: [redacted] 11215

I represent: Student

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/22/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abigail Segura

Address: _____

I represent: Student

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rinia Izquierdo

Address: [redacted]

I represent: personal capacity

Address: rizquierdo4u@gmail.com

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lupe Hernandez

Address: 80 N. Moore St 9J NY NY 10013

I represent: Parent of NYCPS

Address: Lupe.figuera@gmail.com

Zoom Link - Cant stay

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vama Naik

Address: [redacted] 120th St

I represent: Teachers College - Food Ed Hub

Address: 525 W 120th St, New York NY 10027

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimberly Olsen

Address: [redacted] LIC, NY 11109

I represent: NYC Arts in Education Roundtable

Address: 520 8th Ave, NY, NY 10018

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MILES TOUSSANT

Address: [redacted] 53 ST N.Y., N.Y.

I represent: WELLNESS IN THE SCHOOLS.

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kulsoom Tapal

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: CACF-

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

Theodore Tiew

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abigail Chen

Address: CACF - Student

I represent: CACF - Student

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Theodore Tiew

Address: _____

I represent: CACF - Student

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Kubota Nina

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Olivia Li

Address: LFCF

I represent: CACF - Student

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cora Lin

Address: [redacted] Jackson Ave

I represent: SCA

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nina Kubota

Address: [redacted] Jackson Ave, LIC

I represent: SCA

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Violet Lahive

Address: _____

I represent: The Coalition For Community School Excellence

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharingsar Stewart

Address: _____

I represent: Teachers College LCI Community Initiative

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

3/23/2026 ☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Katie Caster

Address: _____

I represent: Teachers College, LCI Initiative. Latinxad Curriculum

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eman Gad

Address: _____

I represent: Girls for Gender Equity

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Allison Garbarini

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Teachers College,

Address: 525 W 120th St New York NY 10027

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pamela Koch

Address: 525 W. 120th St.

I represent: Teachers college Columbia U. From EaHub

Address: 525 W 120th St. New York NY 10027

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sheree Gibson

Address: ~~[redacted]~~ Brooklyn, NY

I represent: NYCPS Title I Parent Leaders

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 2026-03-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Naveed Hasan

Address: 225 Central Park North NY NY

I represent: New York Immigration Coalition

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Brenda Triplett

Address: [redacted] st Freeport

I represent: Childrens Aid

Address: 317 Lenox Ave. NY NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniella Rodriguez

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Youth Advocate

Address:

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ishaq Bekoe

Address:

I represent: Student

Address:

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date:

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karen Rosel - Emmanuel Navy

Address: 5030 Broadway, NY, NY 10034

I represent: City's First Readers

Address:

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASHLEY FRATO

Address: _____

I represent: NEW YORK EDGE - CHAPERONE OF STUDENT SERENITY D.

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophia Vazquez

Address: _____

I represent: Latinidad Curriculum Initiative with Germayoni Lopez

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Germayoni Lopez

Address: _____

I represent: Student for the Latinidad Curriculum Initiative

Address: [redacted] Bronx, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Serenity De Jesus

Address: _____

I represent: Student

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Brazier

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erika Myers Hyde

Address: [redacted] Bronx NY

I represent: Salvadori Center

Address: 475 Riverside Ave St. 239

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3.23.2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ellen McHugh

Address: [redacted] BK 11209

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/23/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Ruiz (student)

Address: _____

I represent: Friends of the Highline

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/23/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nyjhea Pulley (student)

Address: _____

I represent: Friends of the Highline

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Student

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 02/23/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ishaq Berbe (student)

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Friends of the Highline

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Student

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 02/23/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jiaxiang Zhang (student)

Address: _____

I represent: Friends of the Highline

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MORGAN LITTLE

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Planned Parenthood of Greater NY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lizbeth Lucero

Address: [redacted]

I represent: The Urban Assembly

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gilberto, Alvarado

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Anthos Home

Address: 90 Broad St

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Albania Jimenez

Address: 5030 Broadway Suite 641

I represent: Literacy In Community (LINC)

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Madison Mounty

Address: _____

I represent: Simon Wiesenthal Center

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul McKenney

Address: _____

I represent: Arab-American family Support Center

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Anthony Urbanek

Address: [redacted] Jackson Heights

I represent: Transition Alliance

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Angelia (AJ) Botsaris

Address: [redacted] Bayside NY

I represent: Transition Alliance

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adriana Nunes

Address: [redacted] Thorahill Ave.

I represent: Myself

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Miley Gomes

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools - NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASENHAT GOMEZ

Address: _____

I represent: EL PUENTE

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MADISON MOUNTY

Address: _____

I represent: SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAUL MCKENNEY

Address: _____

I represent: ARAB-AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: GILBERTO ALVARADO

Address: _____

I represent: ANTHOS HOME

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HENRY RUBIO

Address: _____

I represent: COUNCIL OF SCHOOL

Address: ADMINISTRATORS

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SOPHIE STELBOUM

Address: _____

I represent: TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Annie Minguez

Address: _____

I represent: Good Shepherd Services (Providers)

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card 48

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yasmin Naji

Address: [redacted] Bronx, NY 10455

I represent: New York Immigration Coalition

Address: 131 W 33 St NY, NY 10001

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Araceli Lucero

Address: [redacted] Bx NY 10473

I represent: Masa / NYIC

Address: 2770 Third Ave Bronx NY 10455

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

#5

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anderlis Feliz-Pena - STUDENT

Address: Ion Cruz

I represent: LION Charter School - Generation

Address: Citizen

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

#4

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peyton Cruz - STUDENT

Address:

I represent: LION Charter School - Generation

Address: Citizen

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

#3

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elmer Reyes - STUDENT

Address:

I represent: LION Charter School - Generation

Address: Citizen

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

#2

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ben Kofman - Teacher 3/23/26

Address: Generation Citizen - LION Charter

I represent: school

Address:

#1

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ebonie Simpson

Address:

I represent: Generation Citizen

Address:

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Kraus

Address:

I represent: NY Lawyers for the Public Interest

Address:

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chadan, Sandra Mitchell

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card 40

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Sonacle

Address: 1010 Ave of the Americas

I represent: Center for Independence of the Disabled

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23rd/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rasheedah Brown-Harris

Address: [redacted] Bronx NY

I represent: Dignity in Schools / Parent Action Committee

Address: [redacted]

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 23 March 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jon Harkland

Address: [redacted] NY NY

I represent: International Workers NYIC

Address: LIC, NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cassie Schwerner

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn NY 11209

I represent: Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Address: 475 Riverside Dr. NY NY 10115

Res 0956, 1.15

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lori Podvesker

Address: 520 8th Ave

I represent: INCLUDENYC

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Teacher

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kyle DeAngelis

Address: _____

I represent: MoRE - UFT

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gray Bruce

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for Equitable Education

Address: Funding Dignity in Schools

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jairo Santamaria

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Guadalupe Tenanthla

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road New York

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brianna Lucero

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alina Flores-Veliz

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anyi neldy Santana Candelier

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Allison Revelo Castillo

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sadeq Rahman

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for Equitable Education Funding / Dignity in Schools NY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ammy Heredia

Address: _____

I represent: Make it Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paulina Milewska

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anna Tallow

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Angely Hernandez

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Connie Chen

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adrina Rokib

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diaraye Bah

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Alonso Rodriguez

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ermione (Aleah) Raymond

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hadia Ali

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kassidy Khow

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laniaya Anderson

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adrian Rangel Sosa

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sebastian Martinez

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mariama Jalloh

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Reinaly Bran

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yaretzi Vidals Hernandez

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Youth

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chamely Uddin

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Adult

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Imani Wilson

Address: _____

I represent: Abolition and Education Justice

Address: Collective - Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Ortiz

Address: [redacted] Bk, NY

I represent: Dignity in Schools Campaign

Address: New York

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natasha Bujosa

Address: _____

I represent: New Settlement Parent

Address: Action Committee / Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chauncey Young

Address: _____

I represent: New Settlement Parent Action Comm/Dignity in Schools NY

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Parent

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Esperanza Vasquez

Address: _____

I represent: New Settlement Parent action Committee

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charlotte Pope

Address: _____

I represent: New York Civil Liberties Union

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Asher Rodriguez

Address: [redacted] 10029

I represent: Myself

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Kaliris Salas

Address: [redacted] NY NY 10029

I represent: CEC 4

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adelo Ramirez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Miatheresa Pate

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erin Gehant

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gregory Brender

Address: _____

I represent: Day Care Council of New York

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Brazier

Address: _____

I represent: Big Brothers Big Sister's of NYC

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Chacko

Address: _____

I represent: Student Leadership Network

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erika Myers Hyde

Address: _____

I represent: Salvadori Center

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Tricarico

Address: _____

I represent: N4CPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Lazarus

Address: _____

I represent: N4CPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☒ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Baldwin Mark

Address: [redacted] (Shelter)

I represent: Jonathon Mark

Address: Unknown address

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Madison Pinckney

Address: _____

I represent: Transition Alliance

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chijindu Obiofuma

Address: _____

I represent: ARISE Coalition

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brenda Garcia

Address: 52 Chamber St.

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LIZ VLADECK

Address: 52 Chambers St.

I represent: NYC DOE

Address: 52 Chambers St.

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark Rampersant

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nyah Berg

Address: 155 6th Avenue New York, NY 10013

I represent: NY Appleseed

Address: 155 6th Avenue Suite 401
New York, NY 10013

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Evan Stone

Address: _____

I represent: Educators for Excellence

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Janice Weinman Shorenstein

Address: 122 E. 42 st.

I represent: Education Through Music

Address: Above

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: President Michael Mulgrew

Address: UFT

I represent: 52 Broadway.

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alan Cheung

Address: 52 Chambers St.

I represent: NYC Public Schools

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kevin Moran

Address: NYC PS

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alan Cheung

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP Anabel Hulla

Address: _____

NYCP

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maribel Hulla

Address: Elisheba Levi

I represent: NYCP

Address: NYCPS

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elisheba Levi

Address: Flovia Puello Perdomo

I represent: NYCPS

Address: NYCPS

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Flovia Puello Perdomo

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mia DeLane Curley

Address: NYCPS

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: St. Michael Cheathar Scott

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: St. Michael Scott

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christine Foti

Address: _____

I represent: NYCRS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Donald Nesbit

Address: Vice President Local 372.

I represent: District Council 37, Local 372.

Address: 125 Barclay Street.

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Randi Levine

Address: _____

I represent: Advocates for Children of New York

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CHRISTINA FOTI

Address: 52 Chambers Street

I represent: NYCPS

Address: " "

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kamar Samuels

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jane Martinez Dowling

Address: NYCPS

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Simone Higgins

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS Jane M

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amy Wan

Address: 639 6th Ave

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elishaba Lewi

Address: _____

I represent: New York City Public School

Address: 52 Chambers Street

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erin Gehant

Address: 52 Chambers St

I represent: NYCPS

Address: 52 Chambers St

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Flavia Puello-Pardomo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark Rampersant

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tamara Mair

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Cheatham

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elyse Nishiura 03/23

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms