

**TESTIMONY OF NYC SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA**  
**ON SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING SCHOOLS**  
**BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Monday, November 23, 2015

Good afternoon Chair Dromm and Members of the Education Committee here today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on New York City's work to turn around our struggling schools. Seated with me are Aimee Horowitz, the executive superintendent for the Office of Renewal Schools at the NYC Department of Education (DOE); Christopher Caruso, executive director of the DOE's Office of Community Schools, and Alonta Wrighton, executive director of elementary and middle schools, in the Office of Renewal Schools.

Aimee is a former social studies teacher and the former high school superintendent for Staten Island. Prior to joining the DOE, Chris was the senior vice president of Expanded Schools at TASC where he oversaw TASC's expanded learning portfolio of 40 schools in three cities. Alonta was previously the principal of P.S. 11 Purvis J. Behan in District 13, a National Blue Ribbon School

This Administration's top priority is to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education that ensures their success as productive adults and critical thinkers. Over the past two years, we have been working to transform the school system. Under mayoral control, we have been able to quickly implement a number of reforms to improve instruction, streamline school support and accountability, and provide students with the academic and non-academic supports required to help them succeed. A year ago this month, as part of this commitment, Mayor Bill de Blasio and I launched the Renewal School program, which includes a \$150 million investment in targeted resources to turn around 94 of our most challenged schools.

Schools were selected to participate in the Renewal School program by using quantitative and qualitative indicators. We selected schools that had been identified by the State as Priority or Focus Schools and had demonstrated low academic achievement for each of the past three years, ranked in the bottom 25 percent of City schools on State math and English Language Arts (ELA) exam scores or graduation rates, and showed limited capacity for improvement, with a rating on their most recent Quality Review of "proficient" or below. We employed a broad set of selection criteria, expanding participating schools beyond the 62 schools considered struggling by the State. Among the 94 participating schools, 43 are located in the Bronx, 27 in Brooklyn, 12 in Manhattan, and 12 in Queens.

Renewal Schools are implementing interventions to accelerate student performance and address achievement gaps. Those interventions include: increased professional development for school leaders, teachers, and other school-based staff through coaches and partnerships with institutions, such as Teachers College at Columbia University; and an additional five hours of Expanded Learning Time each week. To support the whole child, each Renewal School is now a



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Community School, offering wraparound services to our students and their families in partnership with a community-based organization.

We recognize that Renewal Schools enroll a greater percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing, and we are providing teachers and school staff with targeted professional development to address the unique needs of these student populations.

The education reforms we are implementing in the School Renewal Program have a record of driving improvement. First, strong, effective leadership is critical to initiate and sustain turnaround efforts in struggling schools. Since the launch of the School Renewal Program, we have dispatched teams of experienced principals and assistant principals to strengthen leadership and to provide the expertise these schools need to help change direction. Where it is needed, we have, and will continue to, appoint new school leadership to help transform a school and boost student achievement.

Second, increased high-quality professional development provides teachers and principals with targeted support to develop their craft and improve classroom instruction practices. We are investing in deepening teachers' skills through professional development at every grade and in key areas, such as working with English Language Learners and better involving families in their children's education.

Third, Expanded Learning Time extends the school day by one hour each day, giving struggling schools more time for core subject instruction, tailored academic support for students' unique needs, and enrichment activities provided in collaboration with community partners. The goal is to create a seamless school day that reinforces core subject material while providing students with helpful strategies and services that support active learning.

Fourth, all Elementary Renewal Schools will administer the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test to all kindergarten through second graders to determine students' level of reading achievement. This diagnostic assessment focuses on overall reading ability, and specifically, on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. The assessment will identify areas of strength as well as areas of need that require intervention. Academic intervention professional development for Renewal Schools will be tailored to the Gates-MacGinitie diagnostic findings, and Academic Intervention Specialist (AIS) Dr. Eileen Marzola and DOE AIS department specialists will provide this professional development.

Finally, the Community School model, which incorporates academic and social services into the school environment, also provides services to students and communities beyond classroom needs, with the goal of helping students focus and stay on task during the school day. All Renewal Schools in the City have been matched with a lead community-based organization and have hired a community school director—a new leader in the school whose primary responsibility is to coordinate partnerships and interventions. Through these partnerships, we are providing more time for learning, academic support, enrichment activities, health services and



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more. For example, some schools might have a food pantry, so that hunger does not distract from learning. Other schools might have a physician's office on site to keep students healthy, so they do not miss school. Still others might offer English classes for families, so parents can help children with their homework.

Every Renewal School has been partnered with a Director of School Renewal (DSR) dedicated to supporting it. DSRs are crucial to the success of this work. They are the primary point of contact for all things relating to Renewal Schools and are instrumental in supporting schools with implementation of their Renewal Plans, Expanded Learning Time, and Community Schools strategy. DSRs engage with schools in need assessments, root-cause analysis, instructional focus development, goal setting, and action planning. Furthermore, they are the communication link to superintendents and the central Renewal team and bring cohesiveness to this critical work.

In addition, each month DSRs participate in collaborative think-tank sessions where principals, superintendents, and central office staff all convene to identify and share best effective practices within and across their teams and schools. These sessions also provide an opportunity to review data and evaluate what is and what is not working in Renewal Schools.

The 94 Renewal Schools must meet clear benchmarks. Last year, each Renewal School was required to perform a needs assessment across all six elements of the *Framework for Great Schools* (rigorous instruction, collaborative teachers, supportive environment, effective school leadership, strong family-community ties, and trust) to identify key areas for additional resources, and develop a School Renewal Plan. This year, each school must meet the concrete milestones defined in its respective School Renewal Plan, as well as progress on targeted elements of the *Framework for Great Schools*. Each school must also demonstrate measurable improvement in student attendance and retention of effective teachers.

To ensure that all students in Renewal Schools have access to a rich array of programming and strong instructional support, in certain circumstances we may consolidate a greatly under-enrolled Renewal School with another nearby or co-located school, also often under-enrolled, to create a redesigned school to serve students of both schools. A consolidated school can provide students with course offerings in the arts, world languages, as well as academic enrichment opportunities that a very small school is not able to offer due to limited resources.

We are closely tracking indicators that schools are moving in the right direction. After the first year of the initiative, chronic absenteeism, meaning students absent more than 20 days, is down by 3 percentage points.

At schools across the City, there is a sense of renewal. Renewal schools are attracting new teachers. At a recent visit to M.S. 370 School of Diplomacy in District 11 in the Bronx, I met an ELA teacher who had previously worked at a Gifted & Talented school, and came to the school because of its participation in the School Renewal Program. Her explanation, shared with me, was that she wanted to demonstrate to herself that she could teach at an elevated level.



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We have seen increased collaboration among teachers and school leaders, and improvement in students' writing, particularly in volume and depth across content areas. At Renaissance School of the Arts in District 4 in Manhattan, attendance is up 5 percentage points. since the 2012–13 school year, to 95 percent attendance this year, higher than the citywide average. Math proficiency rates are up 3 percentage points, and ELA proficiency rates are up 5 percentage points. Principal Brian Bradley's Community School works with Partnership with Children to offer full-day programming; students are in school from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. During their Expanded Learning Time, students can take classes like coding and brain science.

At Urban Scholars Community School in District 12 in the Bronx, Principal Debra Jones has made family engagement a cornerstone of her efforts to raise student achievement. She hosts monthly breakfasts with parents, giving them a chance to learn about student expectations, voice concerns, and identify areas in need of support. Medals are given to students based on level 3's and 4's received in content areas, and success mentors are assigned to chronically-absent and at-risk students. Teacher teams meet every Friday to review student work. And they're seeing results: ELA and math scores both increased by 10 percentage points.

Ensuring families are actively engaged in this work is critical to achieving academic excellence for children, and family engagement will continue to be a key element in our efforts to improve our struggling schools. Renewal Schools are making schools more welcoming to families, providing parents with tools to support their children's education at home, and offering adult education classes in schools based on parents' interests. At M.S. 53 in Far Rockaway, student-led parent conferences, which enable students to set goals in conjunction with their parents and teachers, have increased 20 percent since last year.

While we are proud of these accomplishments, we know we have hard work ahead. We are holding ourselves and schools accountable for rapid improvement, and all options remain on the table, including school closure.

In order for these initiatives to succeed, they must be adequately funded. This year's City budget commits an additional investment of \$57 million, and \$78 million every year thereafter, to bring resources to support Renewal, and Persistently Struggling schools. We are grateful to the City Council for its support.

To further increase educational opportunities for all City students, Mayor de Blasio recently announced new reforms to achieve equity and excellence for New York City school children. This bold plan includes Advanced Placement classes for All, College Access for All, Universal 2nd grade literacy, and a Single Shepherd counseling program for Districts 7 and 23.

Additionally, these new initiatives will ensure that our elementary, middle, and high school students across every neighborhood have access to rigorous academic courses, and we will ensure our educators have the proper training and resources to support our students through these new reforms.



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Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you on this important issue.

I will now turn to Principal Edgar Lin of J.H.S. 22 in District 9 in the Bronx, and Dr. Juanita Rodriguez, DSR for District 11, who will deliver brief testimony. I will then be happy to answer any questions you may have.

*Testimony of Edgar Lin, Principal of Junior High School 22*

Good afternoon Chairman Dromm, and members of the Education Committee here today. My name is Edgar Lin, and I am the principal of JHS 22 in the Bronx. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the School Renewal program and the progress we are seeing at my school.

Since September, two members of our school's community – our Parent Coordinator Yadritza Rodriguez and one of our 6th grade teachers, Alaska McGann have been visiting homes of our students on Saturday through the Renewal program. As Ms. McGann says: "the goal (of the visits) isn't to focus on the 'disenfranchisement, systemic poverty, or all the road blocks they encounter.' Home visits are strength-based. Our families have beautiful systems and gifts. They have a unique understanding of the child, and usually, they know what works! We're there to learn from them!"

To me, that is what the School Renewal program is about – strength-based focus that empowers our entire learning community – students, teachers, and caregivers to work together to ensure high-level learning for all of our students. In schools and classrooms that were written off, there are now endless possibilities for success.

I mention Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. McGann by name because the work of ensuring high-level student learning is accomplished by working as a team. Being a Renewal School is also about how much farther we can get when we're working as a team – with our Superintendent, Leticia Rosario and Directors of School Renewal, and with our families and community members by becoming a Community School.

When I became principal at JHS 22 in 2013, our team began building up school pride – we wear orange to celebrate our mascot, the tiger – and organized our teachers into teams that collaborate and learn from each other. But the new investment and sense of empowerment we now have during this year as a Renewal School feels different – in a good way.

Every student has an extra hour of instruction every day. Working with our Director of School Renewal and our superintendent, we've fine-tuned our teacher teams and are bringing high-impact interventions to every student – 150 minutes of strategic reading intervention and 120 minutes of academic intervention services each week. We've hired additional faculty to work with ELLs and students with disabilities. Professional development is supporting writing across content areas and giving power to student voice through writing. Our Community Schools partner, Sheltering Arms, is coordinating mental health supports and transforming our building



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into a full-service community hub.

And you have to remember; it's not just that these thoughtful resources make a difference for our school. The Renewal investments demonstrate to our community that the City believes in us and believes we can be successful. And we must be – because support and resources requires responsibility and results.

Together, the new resources and sense of empowerment are making a difference. We've raised student attendance from 85 percent to over 92 percent this year. We met math and ELA targets for our special education and ELL students.

We've got a lot more work ahead of us – but we have the resources, and we have a program where our students and teachers believe they can succeed.

I look forward to working with the City Council and all our partners as we make JHS 22 the best school it can be, and I thank you for your time.

Testimony of Dr. Juanita Rodriguez,  
Director of School Renewal for Community School District 11

Good afternoon Chairman Dromm, and members of the Education Committee here today. My name is Dr. Juanita Rodriguez, and I am the Director of School Renewal (or DSR) for District 11 in the Bronx. I work with four schools: three co-located middle schools at Richard R. Green Community Campus – the School of Diplomacy, The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx, and the Globe School for Environmental Research – and one elementary school, PS 112. We've had visits from elected officials in our communities this year. We welcome and appreciate all the support we have received so far and look forward to our continued progress on our path towards renewal.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the work that we are doing in District 11 as part of the School Renewal program, and the strides we have made so far.

As a Director of School Renewal, I have worked closely with my four schools to develop Renewal School Education Plans to strengthen instruction and utilize extended learning time and new resources, and to monitor each school's progress in implementing its plan and meeting its goals.

The support that DSRs and the Renewal team are providing to schools is constant and proactive – I am in my schools every day to determine what we need to focus on, what's working and what's not, and we are always adjusting to ensure our schools are meeting students' needs. It is truly a collaborative approach – and I am glad that one of our principals, Sean Licata from the School of Diplomacy, is able to join us here today. Principal Licata has been a true leader for his students, staff and community. He has become the lead principal of the Green Campus and is a



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driving force in the movement to improve these schools.

In addition to the instructional planning, what's exciting to me is that there is a true spirit of renewal at these schools. I am working side-by-side with my principals to change the image and culture of these long-struggling schools, and we are seeing real progress.

At the three co-located middle schools, more parents and families are coming into the building by having more family nights and open houses throughout the year. We also worked all spring and summer with the building staff, our CBO, and community members to create a more welcoming environment and school culture for students – we repainted the inside and outside of the school, designed and created banners with the school logos to showcase inside and outside of the school, have school leaders greeting students in the morning with music playing, and have developed model classrooms to be used for professional learning and collaboration. And we are getting the word out about the great things happening as we transition into a Community School campus.

It truly makes all the difference: when students and families walk into the building, you see a sense of belief and ownership that wasn't there before. My role is to identify challenges and create solutions – whether it is helping schools to refine or adjust their Renewal school plans, ensuring the CBO has a seamless partnership with school staff, or assisting with making sure the school leaders and teachers are getting the curriculum training, professional development and resources they need. We have a partnership where we can achieve this, and make real progress happen for our students.

We will continue rebuilding together – in and out of the classroom, DOE and DSRs and principals and teachers and families and CBOs – and I am excited to see continued progress on our journey towards renewal. I thank the City Council for its time and support.

TESTIMONY OF  
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

REGARDING EFFORTS TO HELP STRUGGLING SCHOOLS

November 23, 2015

Good afternoon and thank you, Chairman Dromm and members of this distinguished committee, for the opportunity to speak today on the state of New York City's "renewal" schools.

My name is Richard Mantell and I am the vice-president for middle schools for the United Federation of Teachers. Every day, our members serve the 1.1 million students who attend the New York City public schools. On behalf of our members and our president, Michael Mulgrew, thank you for your tireless advocacy on behalf of the children in your districts.

Each and every day, the UFT fights for our students and our school communities. We strongly believe that every child who attends one of the city's public schools deserves a great education.

This underlying principle guided our thoughts in collective bargaining last year, which resulted in a contract that included the addition of dedicated time for professional development and parent engagement, two initiatives which are proven strategies in enhancing teacher skills and building strong home/school partnerships. What's more, it is also the reason that we, as a union, have fought so hard for additional state funding, smaller classes, community schools, PROSE schools, and the expansion of universal prekindergarten.

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As we begin the ambitious work of improving the renewal schools, we are fully aware of the challenges we face and understand what's at stake.

Under the Bloomberg administration, students were warehoused, funding was inequitably allocated, schools were starved of resources, and the city ultimately closed more than 150 schools, leaving unaddressed the root issues that led to their struggles. Far worse, the underlying issues followed the students to the next school, where they continued to fester. It was a destructive and harmful policy.

In stark contrast, Mayor Bill de Blasio and his administration are supporting struggling schools, and believe that these schools can succeed if they're given the resources they so desperately need.



In fact, in spite of the difficulties in obtaining the education funding from the state-stipulated Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement, the de Blasio administration is investing more than \$397 million in the School Renewal Program over three years. That investment translates into the hiring of teachers, coaches, social workers and mental health professionals to tackle the pressing issues in each building. Teachers at these schools are receiving more one-on-one mentoring and professional development.

What's more, schools are being paired with non-profits and other agencies, which can deliver a whole host of programs and services to students and their families, including healthcare and counseling. It's a holistic "community schools" approach that studies have consistently said is an effective one, with each school developing an action plan that addresses its unique needs.

This type of approach is critical: The depth of need among New York City students is huge, and our renewal schools have high percentages of the children who need our support the most. As you know, many of our students come through our doors without school supplies, or breakfast, and often they are underdressed – many don't have warm coats or shoes that fit. Many haven't seen a doctor or dentist in years. Others need glasses or hearing aids, and even when it's a known problem, parents don't have the money to buy them. Some come from troubled homes where just getting through the evening is a challenge, much less finding a quiet space to do homework. And many don't even have a home to call their own. The renewal school model sees these challenges not as excuses, but as issues which our community must address to ensure that all kids enter their classrooms with an equal opportunity to learn.

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The concept of "renewal" is one for which we advocated and, of course, support. Thanks to the mayor's actions, early indicators tell us that these schools are in the beginning stages of stabilization after years of upheaval – a major step forward. When a school community is properly supported, as opposed to publicly vilified, the whole building begins to breathe normally again.

We have teams on the ground visiting renewal schools each week; we've made 400 visits since September, and what we're observing is promising. We're seeing staff members revitalized, embracing the mission at hand and coming to work with a renewed sense of commitment.

In fact, we're seeing viable progress across the board. The 2014-15 School Quality Report data tells us that 87 percent of renewal schools are moving in the right direction. In comparison, last year, nearly one-third failed to meet targets for student achievement. Breaking it down even further, of the 63 elementary and middle schools in the renewal program, 25 schools are meeting their targets in student achievement. In 2014, only two did. The renewal schools also made gains in the number of students proficient in ELA and math that are comparable to students in non-renewal schools.

Through the School Renewal Program, the teachers, the school leadership and the DOE are working together to bring real change to these schools. For example, PS 298 in Brooklyn is working with the Partnership for Children to offer counseling and other supports to students. With targeted reading programs, teachers can give additional help to students during the extended learning time. Teachers are also receiving more professional development. Under new leadership, the school now has administrators that teach demonstration lessons, a real game-changer for teachers at the school. Each of these efforts is making a difference, and helping to strengthen the school and the community.

Another example is the Fannie Lou Hamer Middle School (PS 286) in the Bronx, which is engaging both students and their families in ways that will make a difference in academic achievement at the school. After this District 12 middle school tied incentives to attendance, the needle began moving in a positive direction. As families became involved in the school (for example, taking English classes), attendance improved. Attendance gained two percentage points, moving from 90 percent in 2014 to 92 percent in 2015.

PS 286's extended learning time provides additional instruction and remediation opportunities for all students. But it also includes peer counseling and art instruction. John Hopkins University and the Children's Aid Society, the CBO partners at the school, provide support for better attendance, extended learning classes and social work services.

Other examples of progress:

- Brooklyn Generation (K566) has social workers meeting weekly with teacher teams for "kid talks" to review student problems. These measures have resulted in an attendance increase from 84 percent in September 2014 to 92 percent last May.
- Richard R. Green Campus (X370 Diplomacy, X323 Globe, and X289 Young Scholars) in the Bronx has an after-school program that includes academic help, sports, adult learning workshops, and training for teachers that focuses on student behavior.
- Renaissance School of the Arts (M.S. 377) in East Harlem hired two new social workers who worked with the staff to engage the entire community. They turned the school into a one-stop shop for services. The attendance rate has increased from 88.7 percent in 2014 to 90 percent in 2015, and the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in math is up 50 percent. In English classes, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards has doubled.

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As we move forward, we want to see renewal schools receive additional custom-tailored supports, which will help them tackle the challenges facing our English Language Learners (ELLs) and special education students.

Currently, there are 47,032 students in all renewal schools. Nearly 20 percent are classified as English Language Learners, and nearly a quarter as special education. We're going to have to find the money to hire additional ELL-certified teachers, as well as guidance counselors, paraprofessionals and other specialized professionals.

We also strongly support increased funding for mental and physical health services for students, as well as literacy and job training programs for parents with an eye on strengthening families. Most parents want what's best for their children, and we want the Renewal program to help them become the best parents they can be.

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Turning around a struggling school is hard work, and we are as invested in it as is Mayor de Blasio. We are just beginning to reverse the years of cutbacks and systemic indifference, which decimated these schools. We have a real opportunity to repair that damage, and with the proper resources and funding, we can achieve genuine change. We know these schools require a proactive and strategic intervention built on sound education practice. We believe the School Renewal Program can provide that grounding. We know the results will take time, but we are heartily encouraged with the results so far.

Thank you again for your support of our schools and our members. We look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER  
TESTIMONY BEFORE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
NOVEMBER 23, 2015 OVERSIGHT: DOE'S EFFORTS TO HELP STRUGGLING  
SCHOOLS**

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My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Dromm and the Committee on Education for holding this very important hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

In November 2014 Mayor de Blasio unveiled the School Renewal Program, a strategy to turn around struggling schools, rather than closing or phasing them out, as was the practice under the prior administration. The Department of Education (DOE) identified 94 Renewal Schools to receive additional funding and be transformed into a Community School, in partnership with a community-based organization (CBO), to enable them to offer new services that support children and families, as well as their mental health and physical well-being. Today's hearing aims to examine DOE's School Renewal Program (SRP) and other efforts to help struggling schools improve.

I am a big proponent of the Renewal School model, and feel that we are finally asking the right questions about why students and schools are persistently struggling, and we have finally committed to giving these schools the tools to achieve success. That said, while the Program is well intentioned, we have failed to ask deeper questions about what is needed to make sure the Renewal School Program is not only implemented, but also implemented in a way that systemically improves the Renewal schools. For this to happen we need to address the Blue Book and the inaccurate picture it paints of school utilization and school climate and its role in creating socio-emotionally safe spaces where students have the tools to succeed both academically and socially.

I keep in contact with the Blue Book Working Group and it is clear that at the very core of the success of the School Renewal Program is the question about space. While schools, and especially schools that are a part of the SRP need support, services and partnerships, they also need the necessary space inside their buildings for these services to take place. The DOE has been under fire for years about the inaccuracy of the Blue Book, and its space utilization formula, and even with the DOE adopting many of the Blue Book Working Group's first set of recommendations this past summer, the city did not align class sizes in Blue Book with the goals set forth in the state-mandated Contracts for Excellence plan of 23 students per class in grades 4-8 and 25 in high school. While in their response to the public comments on their 2014-2015 Contract for Excellence (C4E) plan, the DOE wrote that the C4E's class size reduction plan would focus on the 94 schools in the School Renewal Program, according to the DOE's latest class size statistics, as of October 31, 2015, "class size grew by 0.1 from 26.4 students per class in 2015" and there is no apparent systemic class size reduction plan in place for the renewal

schools.

Without the proper class size alignment, we have no way of knowing what services any school can reasonably accommodate without encroaching on classroom space.

I also want to draw attention to the lack of conversation about creating an appropriate school disciplinary culture in the city's Renewal Schools. Recently the Mayor and the DOE announced their *Roadmap to Reduce Punitive School Discipline* aimed at creating safer schools, while reducing student arrests, and disciplinary punitive measures. I commend the administration and the DOE for the formation of the School Climate Leadership Team and their leadership in bringing together a diverse team of advocates, organizers, young people, and the NYPD and DOE to imagine and ultimately actualize what safer schools that respect students' dignity need to look like. In my conversations with Renewal School principals and guidance counselors it has come to my attention that that school climate has not been a focus in the RSP, as it has been in some schools. This is highly misguided, and in my opinion leaves a huge gap in what is needed to create safe and supportive schools.

It is my hope that the DOE not only works toward addressing school climate concerns in the renewal schools by providing training and funding for restorative justice practices for school staff, but in the long term engages in a conversation about the role of the police in our schools. As you are aware in 1998 then Mayor Giuliani entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the NYPD that transferred school safety responsibility from the DOE to the NYPD. While the intention was to ensure the effectiveness of school safety practices, instead we are witnessing the increased militarization of our schools. Normal school interactions, like small fights which rightly used to be under the purview of the Department of Education are now being handed over to the NYPD to be treated as criminal infractions. It is important to note that the DOE spends between 360 and 400 million dollars annually on school safety, and the DOE currently has over 5400 School Safety Agents throughout the public school system, and only 3600 guidance counselors. If the DOE is serious about investing in young people's future, the DOE must take a long hard look at that statistic and actively invest in education of our young people to work to flip the ratio.

As our city comes together to support some of our schools and students who are most in need, it is important that we constantly ask what we can do better, and where the gaps are.

I commend Chair Dromm and the Committee for holding this hearing today and look forward to working with the Council and the Department of Education to continue to support the Renewal School Program.



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## **Testimony of Leonie Haimson before the NYC Council Education Committee**

### **On the Renewal Schools**

November 23, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Leonie Haimson; I run Class Size Matters, a citywide advocacy group devoted to providing information on the benefits of smaller classes to NYC parents and concerned citizens nationwide.

Since last year, the Department of Education has repeatedly claimed in their Contract for Excellence presentations that they would focus their state-mandated efforts to reduce class size on the 94 Renewal Schools. This claim was made in December 2014, in their response to public comments to last year's (2014-2015) Contract for Excellence plan, and in two presentations, in the spring of 2015 and this fall, for this year's (2015-2016) C4E plan, posted online and provided at borough hearings and Community Education Council meetings.

*"To better align with the Chancellor's priorities, C4E's class size reduction plan will now focus on the 94 schools in the School Renewal Program. For more information and for a list of Renewal Schools please visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/RenewalSchool>."*<sup>1</sup>

A link is provided to the School Renewal page where no mention of class size can be found.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE Assessment 2014-2015 Contracts for Excellence Public Comment, December 30, 2014, p. 4 at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/AF304521-9C1E-4EA6-B694-5F9CC80487E9/175614/C4EPublicCommentAssessment20142015FINAL.pdf>

See also DOE Contracts for Excellence Proposed FY 2016 Citywide Plan – (Borough Wide Presentation), July 2015, slide 14 at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/26881653-C4C8-4ACC-AD13-537D6B93B486/184676/2016C4EBoroughPresentation071515FINAL.pdf> and DOE Contracts for Excellence Proposed FY 2016 Plan (CEC presentation), July 2015, slide 14 at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/26881653-C4C8-4ACC-AD13-537D6B93B486/187463/2016C4ECECPresentation.pptx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/RenewalSchool>

This fall I received complaints from parents and CEC members about the increase in class sizes at their schools, including PS 111, a Renewal school in District 30 Queens where Kindergarten class sizes increased to 27 and first grade class sizes to 31. Though the CEC co-chair communicated with the Aimee Horowitz about this, the Executive Superintendent of the Renewal Schools, Ms. Horowitz refused to express any view or to take any action to lower them.<sup>3</sup> On October 19, the UFT also reported that there were hundreds of classes in Renewal schools that violated the union contractual limit of 34 students per class in high schools, and 30 in Title I middle schools.<sup>4</sup>

This fall, Class Size Matters and parents have repeatedly asked DOE officials at CEC meetings and by email for the list of Renewal Schools in which class size has been lowered, what funds are being used to accomplish this goal, and what oversight DOE is exercising to see that this goal is accomplished.<sup>5</sup>

On November 12, I attended an hour long briefing at City Hall by Ms. Horowitz about the various programs the DOE was implementing in the Renewal schools. She made no mention of class size. When I asked her specifically which Renewal schools had reduced class size, and what funding and strategies were employed to accomplish this, she said that all 94 Renewal schools were expected to have “proper” class sizes through the use of their additional Fair Student Funding.<sup>6</sup> When I followed up with an email asking what the definition of “proper” class sizes was, I received no response.

After the DOE released their annual class size reports on November 15, we analyzed the average class sizes at the 94 Renewal schools this year compared to last year. We found that 36 out of 94 schools (about 38 percent) did NOT reduce average class size this year.<sup>7</sup> The highest rates of non-compliance were in Queens, where 50 percent of Renewal schools failed to reduce class size, and in the Bronx, where 40 percent of schools failed to reduce class size.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Aimee Horowitz to Valerie Lamour, October 07, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2015/10/are-5485-classes-this-fall-that-violate.html> and the list of Renewal schools with the most class size violations as of October 19 below.

Long Island High School (Q450) – 140
John Adams High School (Q480) – 70
Richmond Hill High School (Q475) – 67
Martin Van Buren High School (Q435) – 41
Leadership Institute (X276) – 18
Herbert Lehman High School (X405) – 15
DeWitt Clinton High School (X440) – 10
Academy for Personal Excellence (X363) – 7
IS 117 (X117) – 6
Juan Morel Campos Secondary School (K071) – 5

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/C4E-questions-10.12.151.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For more on this see, <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2015/11/my-frustrating-thursday-does-evasions.html>

<sup>7</sup> DOE data for school specific class sizes as of Oct. 30, 2015 by grade and subject area can be found here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/data/classsize/classsize.htm> We averaged the sizes of general education, inclusion and gifted classes at each school. As middle schools report class size two ways, by grade and subject area, we averaged the schoolwide data across both those categories.

We further found that 56 schools (about 60 percent) had at least some classes at 30 or more, and only seven schools (about 7 percent) capped class sizes at the C4E goals of 20 students per class in grades K-3, 23 per class in grades 4-8, and 25 in core high school classes.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2003, in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case, the state's highest court wrote that "[T]ens of thousands of students are placed in overcrowded classrooms ... and provided with inadequate facilities and equipment. The number of children in these straits is large enough to represent a systemic failure."<sup>9</sup>

The Court of Appeals said that our students were deprived of their constitutional right to a sound basic education because their class sizes were too large, and yet class sizes have not decreased significantly since then. In fact, class sizes in grades K-3 have significantly increased since 2003 – and are more than 14 percent larger than when that decision was written.

This year there are over 48,000 K-3 students in classes of 30 or more, and more than 351,776 students in classes that large overall – more than one third of all NYC public school students in general education, inclusion and gifted classes.<sup>10</sup>

Though all students need and deserve smaller classes, students in the struggling schools should receive them first.<sup>11</sup> We strongly urge the DOE to adhere to their promises to parents and the state, and ensure that students in the Renewal schools receive the support they need to succeed by capping class sizes at C4E levels. There is no other education reform that has as strong an evidence base as class size reduction, which has been shown not only lead to better grades, higher test scores, more student engagement and improved graduation rates, but fewer student disciplinary referrals and lower teacher attrition rates as well.<sup>12</sup>

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>8</sup> The DOE does not report on the distribution of class sizes at individual schools, only the largest class sizes, so we cannot ascertain through the data alone how many classes of 30 or more are at the Renewal schools.

<sup>9</sup> Court of Appeals decision, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., et al. v. State of New York, et al., 100 N.Y.2d 893, 911-12, June 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Class Size Matters, "Summary of 2015 Class Size data," Nov. 16, 2015, at <https://share.es/1cpXyu> See also: Ben Chapman and Lisa Colangelo, "More NYC public elementary school students in overcrowded classes, study reveals", NY Daily News, Nov. 21, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Leonie Haimson, "Real Solutions to the Scandal of Struggling Schools," Gotham Gazette, Aug 17, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Institute of Education Sciences., Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide, 2003. See also fact sheets at <http://www.classsizematters.org/fact-sheets-on-the-benefits-of-class-size/>





## Partnership with Children

*Founded in 1908*

### **Public Testimony on “Oversight: DOE’s Efforts to Help Struggling Schools.”**

**Monday, November 23, 2015**

My name is Robin Veenstra-VanderWeele and I am the Chief Strategy Officer at Partnership with Children. For over 100 years, Partnership with Children has been providing critical support and intervention programs for vulnerable youth in New York City. Today, we partner with 32 New York City public schools to provide a combination of comprehensive mental health, social and emotional learning, and community school leadership. Our school partnerships cover the 5 boroughs and include elementary, middle, and high school settings. Partnership with Children is the lead community-based organization in 9 of the DOE’s Renewal School community schools. Including an additional 3 schools, identified by the AIDP program for community school transformation, our work represents 10% of the total community school initiative.

Our commitment to promoting children’s mental health and improving school climate and culture to foster whole-child development is rooted in over 30 years of experience working in New York City public schools. Additionally, our organization is committed to developing children and adolescents who are successful in both school and in life beyond school. We have developed an expertise in addressing the trauma that children growing up in high-poverty neighborhoods bring to school with them. This trauma often leads to high absentee rates, behavior and discipline issues, an inability to focus and interact in class, and therefore low academic achievement. Schools that do not address these challenges often become crisis-driven. Mental health programs, parent engagement initiatives, and support services like those we provide effectively increase attendance, school climate metrics and student achievement and are critical in any school turnaround effort. Thus, we believe that Community Schools are uniquely designed to achieve these goals and amplify our impact in each school.

The recent expansion of the community school network in New York cities’ public schools under the current administration is an exciting time for social service organizations that specialize in school-based services. We are fortunate to have a committed network of experienced non-profit partners as colleagues in this effort. We, like many of our peers in this work, benefit from the advances their work brings to our shared knowledge and understanding of the community school model.

Indeed, there are many studies which support the efficacy of a community school program to increase student attendance, improve school climate and culture, increase graduation rates and enhance community functioning. But, for the purposes of today, it might be more impactful to share some early, anecdotal evidence of this work in schools in New York City.

At Renaissance Community School, a Renewal School middle school in East Harlem, Partnership with Children staff worked diligently to insure that every parent got a call or a home visit encouraging them

to attend the upcoming parent/teacher conferences. Consistent welcoming messages about being a part of your child's educational process into adolescence are a critical component to drop-out prevention. The determination and effort of our staff paid off. The parent/teacher conferences this fall at Renaissance were attended by 86 % of parents. This is the kind of critical investment in community-building and parent engagement we know impacts student achievement.

At Coalition for Social Change, the school safety officers reached out to Partnership with Children's social workers to address discipline issues. Our staff partnered with the principal to implement de-escalation programs and restorative practices, which have improved the discipline practices and simultaneously improved the school culture. In fact, our work there under the Renewal School initiative was recently profiled in the Wall Street Journal.

These anecdotes represent the day-to-day strategic and real-time efforts that we are able to provide to support the academic success of students and the critical improvements in school climate and culture that result in improved outcomes for young people.

While we have seen promising gains in these first few months, the work is just beginning. The challenges our Renewal Schools face, in particular, are daunting and the collaborative work across systems takes time to develop. The critical investments provided by this City Council through the Mayor's Office and the Department of Education provide a transformative opportunity for implementation. We urge this body to begin the work of determining how we will sustain what we've begun after this first 3 year funding period. As you know, schools in high poverty communities experience high mobility rates resulting in new children and families entering every year. We need to make sure that our Renewal schools continue to have the resources beyond the initial 3 year funding. The scope of work and vision that the DOE put forth in this effort – lead the by the very talented team in the Office of Community Schools – should not be limited to a brief engagement.

In closing, it is important for this hearing to highlight the profound potential for an initiative of this scope and scale to dramatically improve outcomes at the student, school, and community level across New York City. While it is too early begin assessing the effort, it's clear to partners in the field that good work has begun.

Thank you for your support and for your attention today.

Respectfully submitted,

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## The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.

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### Testimony of The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.

#### Before the City Council's Education Committee Oversight: DOE's Efforts to Help Struggling Schools Nov. 23, 2015 – Council Chambers

Good afternoon, my name is Grace Bonilla, President & CEO of The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. (CHCF). I want to thank the Chair and members of the New York City Council's Education Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

Founded in 1982, CHCF combines education and advocacy to expand opportunities for vulnerable children and families in New York. Believing that the most effective way to support these families is by building upon their existing strengths and fostering self-sufficiency, CHCF provides a number of programs and services through our Youth Development programs, an Early Care & Education Institute, and Policy and Advocacy initiatives. CHCF's model is innovative in its effective inclusion of cultural and linguistic competencies to effect change. **CHCF is the lead CBO for one renewal school – the Bronx High School of Business**, though we have been partnering in schools since 1992 providing attendance improvement and drop-out prevention programming, responsible fatherhood initiatives, teen pregnancy prevention programs, youth leadership and advocacy projects, parent education and engagement, and extended learning time/after school programming.

CHCF applauds the administration's focus on supporting struggling schools through innovative partnerships with community based organizations that can leverage community assets to turn these schools around. The Community Schools initiative, which includes 94 Renewal Schools that would otherwise have been targeted for closure, provides supports that simultaneously promote improved school culture, improved pedagogical instruction, and increased social-emotional interventions for students and families. The value the Department of Education has placed on the partnerships between schools and CBOs is heartening, and reflects what CHCF has seen on the ground for the more than two decades - that only through meaningful collaboration that lifts up and taps into the strengths of the school community can true success be achieved.

The DOE's Office of Community Schools has been working in good faith with organizations on the ground, and has encouraged feedback from the service providers about the various challenges experienced by the CBOs as this initiative gets underway. Because this initiative inherently

focuses on struggling schools, the experience of CBOs in the schools day to day illustrates the myriad barriers we all are facing as we implement change. We are concerned about the timeline, as the contracts are only for two more years, and we are working in schools facing very high poverty, community violence and very low levels of student, parent and teacher engagement.

Bronx High School of Business, for example, where CHCF is partnered, is now on its third principal in 6 months. Transition of this kind hinders progress. CHCF staff has spent a great deal of time working with each principal, learning about their priorities and finding ways to work together on common goals. The role of a Community School Director and their team is to build consensus, leverage resources and assets, and bring people together to establish the school as a community hub. When a school experiences such dramatic change in leadership in such short intervals of time, this task becomes infinitely more challenging and sets back any significant gains that may have been achieved under the previous leadership. Overcoming distrust, negativity and varying levels of commitment from teachers, students and parents alike is a task that demands a tremendous amount of resources and time.

Additionally, as is prevalent in most struggling schools, the percentage of overage and under-credited youth is staggering and presents a unique area of need that no one was addressing prior to our partnership at the site. We were asked to fill that gap in assisting these youth find alternative placements. While we agree this is an important issue to address, finding the balance of resources and human capital is still underway in order to meet this need but also ensure that the CBO partner's time is best utilized.

In many high schools included in this initiative, high levels of gang activity and school violence are part of everyday life. The time and attention that must be paid to addressing this concern is also taxing for the partner CBO, as is the case for CHCF, and deters progress towards implementing other strategies aimed at creating the community school culture. Mediating conflict, supporting students and parents in the aftermath of conflict, meeting with administration and teachers to address the conflict and ensure protocols are followed and all parties adhere to same policies is a task in itself, and can swallow whole days from CBO staff time.

One of the greatest challenges faced by DOE and the CBO partners on the ground is a varying level of understanding or commitment to the initiative itself by the leadership and staff at different school sites. Because Renewal Schools were selected by DOE, and did not receive this status through a self-selection or application process, the buy-in for many principals, teachers and staff is still an ongoing process, and the negative perception of the Renewal School label (while infinitely better than Phase-Out School) is difficult to shake in some instances.

We are pleased to hear that the Office of Community Schools agreed to send a survey to all principals and Community School Directors prior to Thanksgiving to get a sense of how they perceive the initiative so far, and develop recommendations directly from their feedback to begin to alter negative perceptions or elevate understanding of the initiative. This commitment was

borne out of collaborative discussion with the Coalition for Community School Excellence. CBO's like CHCF are anxious about the lack of clear measurable expectations, especially when our partner schools are also in receivership. The Office of Community Schools has explained that they are working with the state to align benchmarks for the schools in receivership that are also Renewal Schools.

Additionally, DOE has said they will develop a one-pager for each Renewal School based on the Renewal School Comprehensive Education Plan (RSCEP) that pulls out the benchmarks identified throughout the document for each site. Though this plan is a living document, and also includes guidance on process and strategies, it will be utilized by DOE as a guide for the partnership in evaluating how well the partners work together to achieve the mutually agreed-upon priorities. CHCF is concerned about using this document, however, because in our case, as I mentioned earlier, it was created by a team working with a principal who left in June and has not yet been revisited by the *third* principal to lead the school since then.

Parent engagement is a key factor in transforming these schools into true Community Schools. CHCF has seen first-hand how the dedication of additional resources and staff to enhance the school team has made a tremendous difference in increasing the numbers of parents who simply walk through the doors of the school and participate in Family Events and parent-teacher conferences. CHCF is particularly grateful for the Americorps VISTA volunteer that is part of the support we receive as a Renewal School partner, as they have been critical to our success in this area. Each Renewal School receives one volunteer and they may be focused on parent engagement.

While CBO partners in the Renewal Schools may increase the number of staff at a site who speak the language of the parents and families who attend the school, DOE must continue to prioritize the access and availability of translation services to all sites so CBO partners do not just become translators, which takes time away from other priorities. Across the board, in Renewal Schools and everywhere, more support is needed from DOE to address the lack of linguistically appropriate materials and bilingual/bicultural staff.

The Community Schools team at DOE, however, has done a good job of bringing all the CBO partners together to discuss these challenges, share resources and best practices, make general announcements, and network with another. Because each of the Renewal Schools are so different, one size will not fit all in achieving both process and outcome gains.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, CHCF is proud to be a part of this groundbreaking effort to transform schools through the Community School initiative. We have always believed that only through true partnership can schools truly thrive, and become hubs in the community for families, youth, and neighborhood services and businesses. All children deserve to feel proud of their school; should feel protected, respected, and cared for by all adults in the building; families should feel

welcomed and included; and school culture should promote students strengths and foster positive planning for their future.

# **TESTIMONY**

## **NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION CHAIRMAN, DANIEL DROMM**

*Oversight – DOE's Efforts to Help Struggling Schools*

**Presented on  
Monday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015**



**The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators  
Ernest Logan, President  
Mark Cannizzaro, Executive Vice President  
Randi Herman, Ed.D., 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President**

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## NYC Council Education Hearing

### Oversight – DOE's Effort to Improve Struggling Schools

I am Mark Cannizzaro, executive vice president of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). I would like to take a moment to commend City Council Education Committee Chair Daniel Dromm and distinguished members of the City Council for scheduling this important hearing. On behalf of the CSA, I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony concerning the Department of Education's effort to improve struggling schools.

CSA would also like to acknowledge Mayor De Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for their visionary initiative that does not close struggling schools but aims to transform them into vibrant learning communities. This is a welcome change in philosophy from what we experienced with past administrations. We applaud their campaign to bring together school leaders, teachers, other staff and community partners to rebuild and transform specific schools through the DOE's School Renewal Program.

By identifying Renewal Schools as community schools, the Mayor and Chancellor are helping to inspire deeper support among all constituents and encourage genuine partnerships between families, educators and the greater community. High quality, community-based organizations (CBOs) can help provide an educational experience tailored for each student, along with comprehensive services that promote physical health, mental wellbeing and address the after-school needs of their families.

However, in order to stay on track, any new school model requires consistent, reliable oversight and assessment. Plausible data must be gathered and analyzed. Rubrics must be established to determine if community-based organizations are meeting student achievement, attendance and other goals.

School Principals and their school leadership teams must play an important role in all of the above. No one is better equipped than a Principal to guide and evaluate organizational partners. Currently, it is unclear what, if any, role Principals will play in evaluating and, when necessary, replacing CBOs in community schools. If the DOE does not make clear that CBOs are not free agents but are accountable to school leaders and leadership teams, the School Renewal Program is likely to falter. CSA has consistently taken the position that school leaders are best positioned to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of their particular CBO and we reiterate that stance today.

Furthermore, in terms of both academic and supervisory support, the Renewal School Program has room for improvement. Each school is required to provide rigorous instruction, or face clear consequences. To support this effort, the Renewal School Principal has the option to assign a Leadership Coach or Ambassador Assistant Principal to the school community to help address any administrative, advisory or instructional voids that might obstruct institutional progress. Delays in



the placement process are hindering principals. Many of these assignments are still mired in paperwork, compliance checks and other mindless minutiae, which only serve to keep these much-needed professionals from the critical academic tasks at hand. I cannot stress enough that these schools need support now.

Let me hone in first on Leadership Coaches, who are expected to be experienced educators who can support Principals as professional colleagues and thought partners. Sadly, at the moment, bureaucratic red tape is often delaying the placement of the Leadership Coaches. As for those who have been placed, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the roles they are to play. They are supposed to be confidential supporters and critical friends of the Principal. They are not supposed to be policing the activities of the Renewal School Principal to whom they are assigned, principals who are already subjected to a great deal of oversight and supervision.

This is creating mistrust in some schools. DOE needs to make sure that every Renewal School Principal knows that leadership coaches are available, that every Principal who has requested a leadership coach is assigned one, and that these coaches understand the supportive role he or she is expected to play.

The DOE is also coming up short in placing Ambassador Assistant Principals in Renewal Schools. Last summer, CSA and the DOE agreed on the need for these positions. These “ambassadors” would be educators who would introduce and implement best practices from their own schools. To date, not a single Ambassador AP has been placed in a Renewal School. Regrettably, CSA has been forced to file a contract grievance because DOE has been so slow placing these sorely needed supervisors in Renewal Schools.

All of these additional support systems should have been in place at the beginning of the school year. There should have been structured facilitation to ensure effective collaboration between all parties: school leaders, teachers, families and CBOs. We must get this done. We cannot afford further delays.

We must also force ourselves to refocus accountability checks on the specific goals identified in each school’s Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). Last Spring teams were put in place to carefully analyze school needs and develop ambitious yet realistic goals for each. All accountability checks should be almost exclusively focused on progress toward these identified goals.

Unfortunately, time consuming paperwork and Quality Reviews that have a far broader focus and add little, if any, value have been tacked onto well thought out and previous identified accountability measures. These additional measures are counter-productive as they unnecessarily pull school leaders away from the task of improving teaching and learning.

Although we have identified some missteps in the Renewal School model, it is not too late for a course correction. In fact, any program of this magnitude should be expected to hit bumps in the road. The key is identifying areas in need of improvement and moving to make timely adjustments. We have no doubt that our Mayor and Chancellor and all members of our school communities are committed to working collaboratively to make this a successful initiative. We believe that CSA has exactly the same goals as the DOE and that our input is both valued and respected.

CSA and DOE believe in strong schools for all of our children. We look forward to working together more effectively with all constituents to establish guidelines for facilitation, collaboration, and implementation of this most important program.

We firmly believe that our collaborative efforts will yield positive results for our students.



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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
Honorable Daniel Dromm, Chair**

**Presented by Andrea Bowen, Policy Analyst**

**November 23, 2015**

Good afternoon, Chair Dromm and members of the Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Andrea Bowen, and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses, New York City's federation of settlement houses and community centers. UNH member agencies work in partnership with government to provide a wide range of services for populations across the age span—importantly for this hearing, 6 UNH member agencies are the CBO partners at 11 Renewal Schools.

UNH member agencies that serve as CBO partners in Renewal Schools have identified the following implementation challenges. We look forward to working with DOE and other stakeholders to address them:

1. **Messaging and Impact on Enrollment:** One of the major fears of a struggling school is declining enrollment numbers. By labeling a school a "Renewal School," the City is at risk of signaling to parents and students that the school is failing, which could result in further declining enrollment. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that DOE and all other entities related to Renewal Schools send a strong message that being a Renewal School provides resources to address the school's challenges, so that Renewal Schools are places where parents are excited to send their children.
2. **Morale Issues:** In one of the schools listed as "struggling" by the State Education Department (SED), one of our members voiced a serious morale problem, insofar as there was an impression among school staff that the school was imminently closing—which, on the ground, translated to a kind of apathy among school staff to make major changes

in the school's functioning. Speaking to my earlier point, DOE must take extra effort to send the message that there is hope for these schools.

3. **Authority and Role of Principals:** CBO staff members have reported confusion about decision making-authority and their interaction with principals. Principals may attempt to exert more authority than they actually have to the detriment of the CBO's ability to make positive changes for the school. In one specific instance, a principal expressed a desire to fire the Community School Director hired by the CBO within days of the director's hiring. DOE must do all it can to ensure smooth interaction between CBO staff and other school staff.
4. **Standards and Expectations:** For CBO partners to successfully collaborate with schools, they need a clear understanding of what benchmarks and standards DOE is utilizing. Accordingly, it is crucial that DOE continue refining and specifying the standards that Renewal Schools are held to.

Thank you for your time and holding this hearing, and I am happy to answer any questions that you have. You may contact me at [abowen@unhny.org](mailto:abowen@unhny.org) , or 212-967-0322, ext. 324.



**TESTIMONY OF**  
**SPORTS & ARTS IN SCHOOLS FOUNDATION (SASF)**

**Presented to the New York City Council**  
**Education Committee**  
**Hon. Daniel Dromm, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing: "DOE's Efforts to Help Struggling Schools"**  
**Monday, November 23, 2015**

**Presented by: James R. O'Neill, CEO**  
**Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation**

First of all, I would like to thank Chairman Dromm and the entire Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today. This Committee and the City Council at large have been great supporters of SASF after-school and summer programs over many years, and for that we are very thankful.

SASF's Mission is to help bridge the academic performance gap among under-achieving students by extending the school day and year with wholesome, skill-building activities designed to improve children's academic performance, health and wellness, attitude towards school, self-confidence, character and values, and opportunity for lifelong employment.

With public and private support, including the City Council's support, SASF has grown to become one of the largest direct providers of after-school sports, arts and academic programming in New York City and one of the largest providers in the nation. SASF serves 21,000 students in all five boroughs, at 175 DOE schools.

SASF fully supports the DOE's efforts to turnaround struggling schools with its School Renewal Program, which transforms low-performing schools into a community school. SASF is the lead Community Based Organization (CBO) in five community schools: MS 53 (Far Rockaway); New Explorers High School (South Bronx); Teaching and the Professions High School (Bronx); PS/MS 188 (Lower East Side, Manhattan); and the Ebbets Field School MS 352 (Brooklyn). These schools are only beginning their efforts as Renewal/Community Schools but we have already implemented strong new programming to raise attendance and academic achievement.

SASF is also providing after-school services with funding from DYCD at the following Community Schools: Flushing High School, Banana Kelly and Brooklyn Collegiate.

#### **CLOSING GAPS IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

SASF shares the Mayor's vision that every child deserves an equal opportunity to receive a great education, in a great public school. We share the belief that every child can succeed when schools provide a wide-variety of cultural enrichment activities, including sports, fitness and health programming, great visual and performing arts activities, together with extra individualized academic help in math and reading. All of our SASF schools provide these resources.

## **STUDENTS IN STRUGGLING SCHOOLS CAN SUCCEED**

SASF never measures success by a single yardstick, a score on a single test, but believe underperforming students need a holistic, balanced education, which extends the school day with a variety of new educational experiences of opportunities that are more typical of affluent children attending private schools. SASF's mission aligns with the philosophy and strategy of the DOE to rebuild schools, where every student can graduate and attend college. SASF puts a major emphasis on social-emotional learning helping underserved children overcome all the negative factors in their home life that will pull them down, underpinning a cycle of educational failure. SASF brings caring adults into Renewal Schools who instill the values of discipline, resiliency, success, confidence, and academic achievement.

## **SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF NEW SASF RENEWAL/COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROGRAMMING THIS**

### **FALL:**

- **MS53Q:** SASF has implemented a school wide subject based tutoring initiative. SASF tutors join classroom teachers providing small group academic intervention services and character education.
- **New Explorers High School:** SASF has implemented a school wide Expanded Learning Time (ELT) initiative based on our Champions Club model. The academic enrichment approach includes activities such as computer science, community service, chorus, band, and dance.
- **High School For Teaching and the Professions:** Supporting a school wide mentoring and peer mentoring initiative.
- **PS/MS 188:** Pre-K 2<sup>nd</sup> grade after school initiative focusing on students living in temporary housing.

Additionally, as the lead CBO, SASF is helping to identify and implement mental health services and we are in the lead in bringing additional family engagement services to schools.

## **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE GOING UP**

The DOE's first goal for Renewal Schools is to raise attendance. This Fall, SASF is involved in expanded attendance teams, and we are supporting the tracking of chronically absent students, re-engaging them in school, enrolling students in sports and arts activities.

I have good news that I would like to share with the Committee. As part of the Renewal and Community School initiative, Flushing High School has implemented a new data tracking system that can generate a faster and more accurate read on attendance and more specifically, what each individual department is doing in terms of academic and attendance including the CBO's and our after school program. Attendance has been one of the biggest concerns in the building moving forward. The renewal school benchmark is to have an attendance rate of at least 85.2% daily average attendance. Currently the school sits at around 83.8%

Moreover, I am proud to share with you that September, October and November school data reports have shown that out of 161 students identified as SASF active participants, they are showing a daily school attendance rate of 95%, roughly 11.2 points higher than that of the school. This is an extraordinary mark with such a high number of high school students.

Furthermore, this helps us in our belief that quality SASF programming and intervention can directly impact school day attendance even at the high school level.

## **SUSTAINABILITY, FUNDING AND QUALITY PROGRAMMING**

The key in making this work is the delivery of quality programs, which require adequate funding. SASF is worried that the Community School model may be handicapped by the lack of sufficient funding, and is aware of the challenge of raising the necessary private dollars to do quality programming. There is no quick fix to turnaround struggling schools. Long term, dedicated, sustainable funding is required. Too often in past Administrations, CBO's have struggled with the long process contracting late reimbursements for expenses incurred.

The City needs to increase the funding role of the Fund for the City of New York, which has provided a no interest loan to CBO's. The Council, as it has done in the past, must keep the funding strong and predictable as it oversees the City Budget.



Finally, we need to marshal financial support from the business community, Wall Street, health institutions, professional sports and arts organizations, and the growing tech industry, who must see now the future of our City depends on the turnaround of struggling public schools, a priority that SASF is deeply committed to in its partnership with the Department of Education.

Thank you.

## **Testimony on Renewal Schools to the City Council Committee on Education**

### **Nov. 23, 2015: Struggling Schools are Filled with Struggling Readers**

Susan Crawford, Director, The Right to Read Project

([www.righttoreadproject.org](http://www.righttoreadproject.org), [SusanCNYC@aol.com](mailto:SusanCNYC@aol.com),

Author of "Help! My Child Isn't Reading Yet – What Should I Do?")

This testimony accompanies the e-mail I sent to the committee last week with links to the following articles: Project Follow-Through, Why Didn't We? (<http://pages.uoregon.edu/adiep/ft/watkins.htm>) and To Help All Children Read, First Do the Math (<http://goo.gl/hVI2az>).

Both articles, plus the one I am attaching to this testimony today, highlight what I believe to be the principle reason for the achievement gap between poorer and wealthier schools and districts: access to the appropriate help for struggling readers. While the current Dept. of Education is instituting a program to help struggling readers at the K-2 grade levels, no comprehensive plan appears to be being put in place to help the hundreds of thousands of struggling readers in grades 3-12. The Renewal Schools program is implementing an array of "supports" to help guide students through to graduation, but what exactly is being done to ensure that each student in those schools is reading, and comprehending, on grade level.

Two persistent assumptions seem to inform the constant rotation of literacy programs that have cycled in and out of our schools over the past several decades. One is that if students are not reading by the end of third grade it is unlikely they ever will. The other, in stark contrast to the first, is that if they have not learned to read from whatever program is being offered, they will "pick it up along the way anyway." In either case, students who still struggle with reading are not being helped once they reach the upper grades.

In today's testimony I want to highlight one program that actually was successful with improving reading skills of struggling readers in struggling schools. That was the "Chancellor's District," implemented by Rudy Crew in the 1990's. I'm attaching two pages of a report on this district written for the AFT in 2002. It highlights the literacy and math programs put in place, along with the smaller class sizes and extensive focus that helped the programs succeed. Oddly, Rudy Crew himself repudiated this program a year ago. Meanwhile, last Friday on "Inside City Hall," Randy Weingarten extolled the program's effectiveness, and said one of her biggest arguments with former Chancellor Joel Klein was over his dismantling of the District.

I urge the Committee to look long and hard at what is working, and what has worked in the past, in reading instruction, and to make sure the taxpayers' dollars are focused on those programs. When appropriate reading instruction and interventions are focused on struggling readers at all grade levels, and in whatever schools they are found, in a sustained and committed fashion, we will finally see the achievement gap close. As Regent Emeritus Adelaide Sanford has said, "We don't have an achievement gap, we have an 'access' gap."

## Rounding Out the Picture: The Chancellor's District Program

The ETS additions to the Chancellor's District program—added instructional and professional development time, school-based staffing, and added pay for staff—do not, of course, exist in isolation. Extended Time Schools, like other Chancellor's District schools, make a comprehensive assault on the troubles of low-performing schools with smaller class sizes, more resources, and an intensive literacy- and mathematics-focused curriculum.

Throughout the Chancellor's District, schools are guaranteed smaller classes—20 students per class in grades K–2 and 25 students per class in grades 3–8. These smaller classes are also well supplied through extra dollars for books and materials.

The instructional program in Chancellor's District schools centers on literacy and mathematics. All of the other usual school subjects are taught—social studies, science, art, music—but, these schools devote considerable portions of the school day to reading, writing, and math, underlining that unless students can master literacy and mathematics, they will not be able to master other subjects. The goal is to enable students to meet New York's state and city performance standards.

### **Building a Foundation in Literacy and Mathematics**

The daily schedule at all Chancellor's District elementary schools includes two literacy blocks. The first spans 90 minutes, the second 60 minutes. The intent is that students will become proficient, independent readers by the end of third grade, and will then continue to build their reading and writing prowess as they progress through school.

The Chancellor's District adopted Success for All (SFA) for elementary students' first daily literacy block. Developed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, SFA offers materials, instructional strategies, and a system for managing literacy-focused time. The second daily literacy block focuses on an approach called "balanced literacy," which employs a diverse array of instructional strategies (such as reading aloud, shared reading and writing, and literature circles) designed to tap students' different strengths and interests.

Middle school students have a daily 90-minute literacy block that uses balanced literacy strategies that work to increase students' ability to think more deeply and write about what they are reading in a more focused way. In-depth discussions of fiction and non-fiction trade books, as well as other reading materials students select themselves, serve as the core materials. Middle-school students in Chancellor's District schools also have a scheduled skills-building period twice a week to enhance their ability to comprehend

and enjoy more sophisticated literature, including complex texts from content area subjects.

Mathematics instruction in Chancellor's District schools centers on a required curriculum tied to New York state and city performance standards. In addition to the mathematics block, students have designated skill-building math periods—30 minutes three days a week for elementary students, one period twice a week for middle school—to help them extend their content knowledge and their understanding of core mathematical concepts.

To be sure, structured curricula have their critics. Educators and researchers who find fault with these programs rail against their rigid schedules and scripted approach to teaching. However, both the teachers and principals interviewed for this article are positive, even enthusiastic, about the Chancellor's District curriculum. At P.S. 180, Kimberly Ambrecht attributes much of her students' success to the 90-minute SFA block and its emphasis on decoding and reading comprehension skills. "The biggest change over the past four years is that most of the kids are now reading on grade level. And that's a huge change from when I first started. The kids are starting to really be successful."

Less experienced teachers say the literacy and mathematics programs help them to gain a better handle on instructional strategies and techniques as they build their own instructional repertoire. More experienced teachers acknowledge that the literacy programs in particular are quite structured, but say there is room for teachers to be creative. "We can change the literature [with the approval of the SFA facilitator] as long as we maintain the pacing and techniques," says Yvette Vasquez, UFT chapter leader at P.S. 212. The creative challenge for the teachers is that, "It's up to the teacher to keep it fresh and fun."

Similarly, Ambrecht notes that she's been given the autonomy to make sure she is meeting her students' needs. In the second literacy block, Ambrecht says, "the kids are supposed to write twice a week, but in my class the kids write every day; they are phenomenal writers. I think writing equals success: If you can write it, you can read it."

Most importantly, both principals and teachers praise the literacy and mathematics curricula for contributing to students' academic progress. Says David Harris, principal at M.S. (middle school) 246, "Our reading and math scores have gone up every year [since we've been part of the Chancellor's District]. And every year we've met our performance targets."

- See more at: <http://www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/winter-2002/using-well-qualified-teachers-well#sthash.TLPvy9jO.dpuf>

Testimony to the Education Committee  
of the New York City Council.

November 23, 2015

“Struggling Schools”  
[And Environmental Health Issues]

Joseph Mugivan  
Advocate for School Indoor Air Quality  
[j.mugivan@yahoo.com](mailto:j.mugivan@yahoo.com)

Honored Chairman and Council Members  
of the Education Committee  
of the New York City Council:

November 23, 2015

It is a pleasure to return to this Committee after a long hiatus as an advocate for school indoor air quality. One of the items mentioned for this hearing on struggling schools is the “physical well being” of the students.

Learning can be influenced by environmental factors affecting the health of a student, particularly with damage to the nervous system by environmental toxins. The visual system is the most sensitive part of the human body controlled by the nervous system and such damage can affect the ability to read. Such “visual convergence” problems are rarely investigated or diagnosed, but these “accommodative spasms” lead to the labeling of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and other reading difficulties.

I have attached a copy of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Weston Report, which promoted the disengagement of the Vapor Extraction System at my former school, PS 7 in Elmhurst, Queens. This school was built on a severely contaminated site and it became the victim of an “out of sight, out of mind” regulatory system. This may also apply to all schools that are within one block of a State certified spill site.

Throughout the previous administration, numerous schools were built on such sites and it is difficult to determine if there is any follow up monitoring. One industrial hygienist with the New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) was stunned that there would be no future monitoring protocols at my school.

In an attached email from Clare Barnett of the Healthy Schools Network, We learn of a “Rube Goldberg” set of protocols to monitoring the engineering of a school with the obvious exclusion of actually monitoring the air quality.

She states:

Dear all/ in 1997 NYS with Shelley Silver's leadership enacted a comprehensive law that requires- among other items- that all public schools in NYS make public annual visual inspections of schools as well as 5-year inspections. Inspections must include bldg systems associated with IAQ- roof, walls, windows, heating etc  
But NOT vapors or chem spills which require testing, not visual verification

In response to the work that I was doing, as outlined in my attached letter, published by the labor newspaper, The Chief, in its Labor Day edition, and my termination as a teacher, former City Council Speaker Christine Quinn submitted my name under her recent "Teacher Whistleblower Law". This investigation languished during the previous administration, but received new life under the current administration.

After being unable to rebut any information from my 140 page report after a six month investigation, the Department of Investigation would not investigate my claim under Speaker Quinn's Law and indicated that it was "untimely". This is the proverbial child seeking mercy as an orphan after killing his parents.

Recently, the Office of the New York State Comptroller submitted my whistle blower case to the City Comptroller's office through its Intergovernmental and Community Affairs Department in August, where it is again languishing.

If the Committee is serious about soliciting testimony, for some at a great expense, to protect our schools, my experience over the past ten years should not occur again.

This may be the first, and possibly the last, teacher to appeal through your own legislation designed to protect children (and teachers).

Very truly yours,  
Joseph Mugivan  
Advocate for School  
Indoor Air Quality.

**REPORT ON CONTINUED ENVIRONMENTAL  
ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES  
P.S. 7Q ELMHURST, QUEENS, NEW YORK**

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Prepared by:

**ROY F. WESTON OF NEW YORK, INC.**  
One Old Country Road  
Carle Place, New York

Prepared for:

**NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL  
CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY**  
30-30 Thomson Avenue  
Long Island City, New York

**000434**

August 1994

**NYC0003491**



as adhesives, paints, thinners, roofing materials and sealants. Additionally, the numerous automotive emissions due to neighboring traffic is a potential source for the ambient air and SSDS VOC concentrations reported.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WESTON has completed a continued environmental testing program that evaluated the need to operate the SSDS underlying P.S.7Q and the requirement for further groundwater treatment. This included the laboratory testing of soil gas samples collected from within the SSDS, in conjunction with groundwater quality analyses, to provide current and quantitative data to assist in the decision making process. The results of sampling and analysis were compared to the allowable indoor air concentrations of volatile organic compounds established in USEPA's data base for all site types, the ambient background air concentrations and remediation goals for groundwater from the site-specific risk assessment.

Based upon an evaluation of this current analytical data, there will be no apparent environmental benefit to the indoor air quality of the school by the operation of the SSDS underlying P.S. 7Q. Additionally, due to the low concentrations of remaining residual non site-related VOCs, no further treatment of groundwater is recommended at this time. These recommendations are made based upon the fact that no relationship is apparent between those VOCs reported in soil gas samples collected from the SSDS and those reported in the underlying groundwater. Additionally, ambient air concentrations support an ambient air source for the VOCs reported in the SSDS. The quarterly monitoring of groundwater will continue and this monitoring will be the ongoing tool to be used to determine if any additional SSDS or indoor air sampling is required.

Groundwater monitoring will continue on a quarterly basis for one year. If after three more rounds of testing, groundwater quality (types of VOCs and concentrations) are similar or less than that reported in May 1994, a formal request will be made to NYSDEC to discontinue groundwater monitoring. After the one year, WESTON will also make a recommendation concerning the activation of the SSDS.



Winner of the 2003 George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language



**[Susan notes:** Former teacher Joseph Mugivan has fought a long, hard fight over the need for schools to be tested for air-quality safety. The air teachers and students breathe seems to be an issue few care about.]

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Write to Susan

## To the editor

It was interesting to read about the debate over Teacher tenure (Sept. 4 article). It must be realized that it does not exist for Teachers exercising their Federal and State rights due to environmental exposure.

Post-9/11 New York City brought air-quality testing to the fore, along with a push to build schools on previously owned industrial sites. Mayor Bloomberg created Intro. 650 before the New York City Council, to mandate that all air-quality testing go through the Police Commissioner's approval process.

The unions were up in arms, particularly those whose workers were with the utilities below ground. I had the opportunity to serve on the Mayor's Commission, in opposition, alongside the unions,

NYCOSH and NYLPI, as a Teacher advocate. Intro. 650 was defeated.

Schools were also experiencing issues post-9/11, as the zoning laws were rescinded and questionable locations became available for their construction. Industrial sites that lay fallow saw opportunities for development. Technology advanced and vapor-extraction systems (VES) were installed. Schools would now need to be, hopefully, monitored in perpetuity.

In 2007, Info Tech High School, a former metal-plating factory site, leased by the Dept. of Education (DOE) in 2003, was the scene of one such event. The city had not foreseen the future complications of this new policy.

I was terminated, when driven from my school in Elmhurst in 2003 attempting to exercise my rights to an air-quality test at this former Water Department truck yard. The Principal and the Director of the union's Safety Division sought retirement the following year.



THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
CITY HALL  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

CHRISTINE C. QUINN  
SPEAKER

TELEPHONE  
212-788-7210

November 14, 2008

Joseph Mugivan  
231 Manorhaven Blvd  
Port Washington, NY 11050-1468

Dear Mr. Mugivan:

Thank you for contacting me regarding your termination from your position as a teacher in the New York City public school system. I truly appreciate your dedicated service to our City's children.

It is my understanding that you were employed at PS7 in Elmhurst, Queens and believe that you were sickened by toxic fumes in the school. You claim to have been unfairly terminated "while waiting for the vapor intrusion report" for PS7. You also state that you submitted a letter to the Comptroller's office in August in which you requested whistleblower status and protection.

As you know, the City Council passed Int. No. 83-A, (Local Law 25 of 2007) extending the City's whistleblower protection to public employees who make a report concerning conduct that presents a substantial and specific risk of harm to the health, safety or educational welfare of a child. In the bill, "educational welfare" is defined as any aspect of a child's education or educational environment that significantly impacts such child's ability to receive appropriate instruction. This bill was enacted into law on June 5, 2007, following the City Council's override of the Mayor's veto.

Please be advised that the law does not trigger the Council's public hearing process. Rather, the only role of Council Members is that they, or the Council, may refer any such reports to the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI).

I understand that you have taken several steps to try and rectify your situation, including contacting the Comptroller's office. I have taken the liberty of forwarding a copy of your correspondence and submitting your request to DOI. If you have not done so already, you may also file a complaint directly with Rose Gill Hearn, the Commissioner of DOI, via the following:

- Mail: P.O. Box 100, Church Street Station  
New York, NY 10007
- Telephone: (212)-825-5900
- E-mail: <http://nyc.gov/html/doi/html/contact.html>

Upon receipt of a complaint, the Commissioner is required to conduct an inquiry to determine whether anyone retaliated against the complainant through an adverse personnel action. It is required that a final determination be provided in writing to the officer or employee who filed the complaint.

I hope this information is helpful. Thank you again for contacting my office regarding this important matter. If I can assist you further in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine C. Quinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christine C. Quinn  
Speaker

Enc. (1)



40 Exchange Place  
Suite 1820  
New York, NY 10005  
(212) 627-2227  
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**New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Struggling Schools  
Testimony by Sooah Kwak, New York Immigration Coalition  
November 23rd, 2015**

Good afternoon, and thank you to the members of the Council for convening this hearing and to Chairman Dromm for his continued leadership for immigrant communities.

My name is Sooah Kwak, and I'm the Education Advocacy Fellow at the New York Immigration Coalition. We are an umbrella policy and advocacy organization with nearly 200 members from New York State, and we aim to achieve a fairer and more just society that values the contributions of immigrants and extends opportunity to all. As part of this work, we convene an Education Collaborative of grassroots immigrant organizations, policy and legal organizations and practitioners. Together we fight to increase English language learners' (ELLs') and immigrant students' access to a quality education and to expand opportunity for their parents to be engaged.

Thank you for this opportunity to share perspective on Renewal Schools. We applaud Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for devoting resources to the city's most vulnerable schools. We stand here today as a member of the Coalition for Community School Excellence and strongly support the recommendations of our partners.

As Council knows, graduation rates and proficiency levels for ELLs lag far behind their English-speaking peers with only 1 in 3 ELLs graduating on time. English language learners face huge obstacles to academic success. About two-thirds of children who have not yet learned English are living in poverty, compared with only one-third of English proficient children. Their parents are also more likely to have limited schooling.<sup>1</sup> These students face the daunting challenge of learning English and adjusting to a new country, all while catching up to meet academic requirements in science, math, and other subjects.

The DOE has been taking important steps to improve outcomes for ELLs such as addressing barriers immigrant parents face accessing language services in NYC Schools and expanding dual language programs. However, I'm here today because more needs to be done for ELLs, especially in schools that are already struggling with achievement and graduation rates. The NYIC is particularly invested in the success of Renewal Schools as they have an oversize share of English Language Learners, 20% of students in renewal schools are ELLs compared to 14% in other DOE schools.<sup>2</sup> If ELL educational outcomes can be improved in Renewal schools, there is a great chance that Renewal Schools will see a boost in achievement, a critical measure that will determine whether these schools will fall into receivership by the State.

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<sup>1</sup> Margie McHugh, LEP and Immigrant Students in US Schools (October 19, 2006), National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy

<sup>2</sup> See

<http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/alternative-school-closure-significant-resources-directed-towards-94-renewal-schools-may-2015.pdf>

## SOLUTION

### **Reverse the immigrant and ELL dropout crisis by fostering school, family and community partnerships.**

- The DOE must eliminate the language barriers that prevent family engagement in schools by ensuring the full implementation of Chancellor's Regulation A-663. Moreover, Renewal School staff should have specialized trainings on how to improve language access services in their schools and meaningfully engage immigrant families. We urge DOE to build a partnership between schools and families that recognizes and fosters communities' histories, languages, cultural backgrounds, and heritage.
- The influx of new teachers and administrators placed in Renewal Schools need adequate supports and training to ensure they are qualified to work with ELLs and diverse communities. Moreover, ongoing training should monitor and evaluate whether schools are able to assess families' needs and provide culturally competent services.
- We also urge the DOE to foster meaningful school-community partnerships. While the current structure does allow for some collaboration, the DOE should also identify a wider range of community-based organizations that are familiar with the challenges of immigrant parents and ELL students and know best how to serve them. Small community organizations that work with immigrant families are often the first and most trusted resource for immigrant families and should be given a voice in the Renewal School structure.

This is a critical time to ensure that Renewal Schools and its students have the tools they need to succeed, with many schools having just one year left to turn around. Stakeholders have put everything on the line to strengthen these schools. The DOE needs to ensure that schools are getting the supports they need and are doing their part to provide quality services to parents, community groups, and all students, including ELLs.

Thank you.



Testimony of

Alexis Henry

Policy Associate for Early Childhood Education, Education, and Youth Services

Citizens' Committee for Children

Before the

New York City Council

Education Committee

***Oversight – DOE's Efforts to Help Struggling Schools***

November 23, 2015

Good afternoon. My name is Alexis Henry and I am the Policy Associate for Early Education and Education at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC). CCC is a 72-year old, privately supported, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

I would like to thank City Council Education Committee Chair Dromm, as well as the members of the City Council Education Committee, for holding today's oversight hearing regarding the Department of Education's (DOE) efforts to help struggling schools. CCC appreciates all of the efforts the City Council has taken to strengthen and support the City's education system.

CCC is also hopeful that the initiatives that Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina have begun to put into place to better engage parents, support teachers and principals, and meet the needs of the City's over 1 million school children will lead to better educational outcomes.

### **Renewal Schools**

Mayor de Blasio's approach to improving outcomes at struggling schools is the creation of 94 Renewal Schools. While the Bloomberg administration would have likely slated these schools for closure, the Renewal School program aims to transform these schools into community schools with a three year timeline for rapid academic improvement.

The Community School strategy allows schools to strategically organize resources and provide social services for students, families and the larger community.<sup>1</sup> We know from research and experience that well-established community schools have positive impacts on academic achievement, graduation rates, post-secondary outcomes, attendance, and attitudes towards school. A study of two community schools in NYC found that the community school strategy can produce a \$10 to \$15 return for every \$1 invested.<sup>2</sup> Community schools are known to have a profound impact on not just students and families but the larger community as well.<sup>3</sup>

The Community School model not only provides a holistic model of services for children and their families, but also emphasizes improving school climate. As schools change the way they interact with students, families and communities, there are the added benefits of improved stability and strengthened community pride.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In New York City there are 212 Community Schools: 71 Renewal, 31 AIDP, 16 State-funded Community Schools, 63 Beacon Community Schools and 31 Schools that receive one or more types of community school funding streams. There are also UFT Community Learning Schools and Children's Aid Society and Center for Family Life community schools not included in this count.

<sup>2</sup> Belay, K., Mader, N., Miller L. September 2014. Scaling the Community School Strategy in NYC: A Systems-Building Guide. New York, NY: The Center for New York City Affairs The New School, Children's Aid Society.

<sup>3</sup> Coalition for Community Schools. May 2013. Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools. Washington, DC.: Coalition for Community Schools.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



To strengthen, support and sustain Renewal schools and the community school model for the long-term, we respectfully make the following suggestions:

- **Clear benchmarks of progress are needed.** While individual schools and CBOs have created their own comprehensive implementation plans, DOE has not yet articulated the systemic benchmarks of success for the initiative. Specifically, given that each school is at a different starting point, it would be helpful for each school to know what level of academic improvement will be needed to avert bad consequences (such as receivership, closure, etc.) Knowing these academic benchmarks would help the schools and CBOs tailor their individual plans.
- **Ensure Community School funding is sufficient and sustainable.** While Renewal Schools have received additional funding, it is unclear whether the funding is sufficient to meet each school's needs or how long the funding will last. For example, CCC is particularly concerned about the funding for mental health services at the Renewal Schools. While the Renewal School model embraces the need to imbed mental health services in schools, it provides the funding for a mental health staff person and not a clinic. It is therefore unclear whether the funding is sufficient in the short-term nor whether this funding will remain ear-marked and available for mental health services in the longer-term. In addition, Renewal Schools are expected to be removed from the Renewal Schools list when they become successful in accomplishing their goals, which could make them ineligible for the very funding that promoted their success. The community school strategy needs to be a long term one, so the funding must be sustainable. In addition, it is critical that when the administration allocates funds for community schools that this funding be new funding and not be dollars currently used for another child-serving service (as almost occurred last year with summer camp funding.)

### **Support for Struggling Schools**

CCC appreciates the City's commitment to improving academic outcomes while also promoting children's mental health and physical well-being. In the early years of the de Blasio administration, we have begun to see important improvements citywide— attendance rates have risen from 90.9% to 91.5%<sup>7</sup> and suspensions are down 17%.<sup>8</sup> There was also some improvement in Common Core test scores. This year the percentage of children whose scores met the English (ELA) proficiency standard increased to 30.4% from 28.4%.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, 35.2% of students were proficient in math, up from 34.2% in 2014.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Chancellor Fariña. (2015, October 14). Public Hearing on Chronically Struggling Schools and School Receivership, Testimony. [http://nystateassembly.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=8&clip\\_id=2863](http://nystateassembly.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=8&clip_id=2863).

<sup>8</sup> Wall, P. (2015, October 30). School suspensions fall sharply, but continue to land most heavily on black students <http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2015/10/30/school-suspensions-fall-sharply-but-continue-to-land-most-heavily-on-black-students/?#.Vk9po3arTct>.

<sup>9</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children, Keeping Track Online. <http://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/153/reading-test-scores-common-core-3rd-through-8th-grades#153/a/2/242/21/a>.

<sup>10</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children, Keeping Track Online. <http://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/158/math-test-scores-common-core-3rd-through-8th-grades#158/a/1/275/21/a>.

- **Universal 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Literacy:** By FY2019, all second graders will have access to a reading specialist.
- **Algebra for All:** By FY2022, all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will have access to algebra and all students will complete algebra no later than 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- **Computer Science for All:** By 2025, all students will receive computer science education.
- **AP for All:** By FY2022, the students at all 400 NYC high schools will have access to Advanced Placement (AP) classes.
- **College Access for All:** By FY2018, all middle school students will have the opportunity to visit a college campus and high school students will have tailored supports to help them pursue college.
- **Single Shepherd:** In FY2016, every student in Grades 6-12 from Districts 7 and 23 will be paired with a single person to help guide them through high school and provide them with academic, social and emotional supports.

While we believe that the efforts the administration has taken will go a long way towards helping struggling schools, we believe that there are additional steps that should be taken to further strengthen the City's education system.

- **Prioritize struggling schools in the roll-out of the Equity and Excellence reforms.** Given that this plan will not be fully implemented until 2026, we suggest that the administration prioritize the struggling schools first so that reading specialists, computer science education, academic supports for algebra, etc. all come to any school identified by the state or city as struggling first. In addition, if there is any way to expedite some of the roll-out for all schools, we think that would be beneficial.
- **Strengthen the financial viability of school-based mental health clinics and increase the number of schools with clinics.** While we know that school-based mental health clinics help improve academic and other outcomes for children and youth, the current financing structure of these clinics has led to the closure of hundreds of school-based mental health clinics. It is critical that the administration work with the providers and the state to ensure the viability of the clinics through ensuring clinics are reimbursed for critical components of their work such as class observation, teacher coaching, working with parents and holding groups and ensuring clinics do not have to pay schools a custodian fee to be open after school. The administration should be developing a strategy to expand these critical school-based services.
- **Hire additional guidance counselors.** CCC appreciates the investments the City has made to increase the number of guidance counselors and would like to see continued investments to support students in struggling schools. Guidance Counselors are uniquely positioned to support the socio-emotional needs of students and have a positive impact on academic achievement and graduation rates.
- **Make lunch free for all public school students.** Children who are hungry cannot learn. When lunch is universally free, it removes the stigma students eligible for free or reduced price lunch otherwise feel. We have seen an 8% increase in the middle school lunch take-

City Council testimony on Struggling Schools  
Maria Bautista  
Alliance for Quality Education

Good Afternoon,

My name is Maria Bautista. I'm with the Alliance for Quality Education.

Thanks to the Education Committee for organizing this very important hearing.

In the Alliance for Quality Education's (AQE) 15-year fight for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education, it is important that we both support and push the DOE in its plans to transform persistently struggling schools. AQE established its position firmly against receivership of schools since Governor Cuomo proposed it in his 2015 State of the State; for fear that it would undermine local power and true parental/community engagement in the public education of their children. In the case of schools identified by the state as 'persistently struggling' and 'struggling' schools our concerns remain valid.

One of our biggest concerns is warding against independent receivership and ensuring that schools are provided with the proper supports, information, and resources to successfully do so. It is particularly important to remain steadfast in safeguarding meaningful parental and community involvement in the design and implementation of plans for transformation, as a negative consequence would most affect them and their children in the long run.

There are currently at least 6 New York City Schools at risk of being placed under independent receivership, with only a year to make 'demonstrable improvement'. The efforts within these schools need to be taken to the next level. It is the DOE's responsibility to make sure that parents and staff are clear on what exactly it means to be a receivership school and based on the plan put forth, what their role is in securing 'demonstrable improvement.'

As an advocacy group fighting to ensure proper funding and resources go to these schools we must hold the DOE accountable in providing an understanding to the schools that warrants proper use of any and all resources available to them. As part of both a citywide list of renewal schools and a statewide list of persistently struggling schools, these schools must be able to combine efforts towards a set of common goals to overcome these labels. Because their liberty as a deeply community involved school is under time constraint it is especially important that no efforts be wasted.

We cannot ignore the threat to school morale with the many labels that these schools face, whether it be renewal, struggling or persistently struggling. Teachers, staff, and students need to feel secure in their school. Proper training for teachers and staff to provide challenging and

culturally relevant curriculum as well as skills to support the social, emotional and health needs of students is vital, in all cases of defining improvement. Improving academic success while providing supports for the whole child is a necessity in the transformation of these schools.

We must ensure that more than just testing is considered when planning and assessing improvement. The DOE must partner with the state to ensure that schools are hitting the proper benchmarks to be on track in all aspects of transformation. There needs to be clarity and transparency between governing groups and the parents, staff and community members involved in implementing a school's plan.

We cannot set our schools up to fail. Just one year is already a short ask for such a huge task as turning a school around. The State Education Department's plan for persistently struggling schools has proven to provide challenges for these schools in the forms of timing and clarity on what exactly qualifies as 'demonstrable improvement.' Nonetheless, these are our NYC students, and as long as the DOE remains steadfast in being a support for these schools, by providing clear communications as to what is expected and the resources necessary, we believe the schools can do it.

This process must be fair and achievable and this must be taken seriously, by all parties. Our children deserve our best shot and we must take all steps to make sure that the SED, the DOE, and the Community Engagement Teams, all do their part to give this to them.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dionne McNeil  
Address: 184-01 Fort Boulevard Apt 69  
Jamaica, NY 11434  
I represent: August Martin HS  
Address: Jamaica, NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robin Veenstra-VanderWeele  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
I represent: Partnership with Children  
Address: 299 Broadway, Suite 1300, NY/NY 10007

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gale Brewer ← Ayisha Ifan on behalf of  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
I represent: Manhattan Borough Board  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Bower

Address: 70 W 36th St 5th Fl NY NY 10018

I represent: United Neighborhood Houses

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TILO O'NEIL

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Spoken ARTS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Katrena Perou

Address: 21 Howard St 5th Floor

I represent: Urban Arts Partnership

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

Name: Randa Stewart (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CCSE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Susan Crawford (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 501 W. 115<sup>th</sup> St NYC

I represent: The Right to Read Project

Address: SA 1152

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

Name: Bob Alexander (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 40 Exchange Place

I represent: East York Immigration and Justice

Address: 233 Broadway

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Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11-24-2015

Name: Edgar Lin (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Principal of JHS 22, NYC DOE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11-24-2015

Name: Edgar Lin (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 52 Chambers St

I represent: NYC DOE Chancellor

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: 11-24-2015

Name: Aimee Horowitz (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 52 Chambers St

I represent: NYC DOE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11-24-2015

Name:

Dr. Juanita Rodriguez  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address:

I represent:

Address:

Director of School Renewal BxSD11  
NYC DOE

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Christopher Caruso  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address:

I represent:

Address:

52 Chambers St  
NYC DOE

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Alonta Wrighton  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address:

I represent:

Address:

NYC DOE 52 Chambers St  
NYC DOE

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Renewal 5/1 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: Nov. 23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leonie Harrison

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Class Size Matters

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alexis Henry

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Citizens' Committee for Children

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rueben Traite

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCC

Address: 1 Metrotech Ctr North

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/24/15

Name: Natasha Capers (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 80 Osborn St.

I represent: Coalition for Educational Justice

Address: 233 Broadway

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Felicia Alexander (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CEJ - Coalition for Educational Justice

Address: 233 Broadway

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Joseph Mugivan (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: P.O. Box 561 Port Washington NY

I represent: Environmental Concerns as a Teacher

Address: and Advocate

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Usatch

Address: 7<sup>th</sup> + 8<sup>th</sup> grade social

I represent: UFT D students

Address: 52 Broadway

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Barrow

Address: 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

I represent: UFT

Address: 52 Broadway

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark (7412720)

Address:

I represent: Council of School Administrators

Address:

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/23/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rich Marshall

Address: Vice President of M. J. J. Schools

I represent: UFT

Address: 52 Broadway

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/24/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dianne McNeil

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Alliance for Quality Education

Address: 233 Broadway

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Grace Benilla

Address: Committee of Hispanic Children & Families, Inc.

I represent: 75 Broad Street, NY, NY 10004

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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