

**Testimony of NYC Department of Education
on Youth in Shelter and the School System**
April 16, 2021

Testimony of Christopher Caruso Senior Executive Director, Office of the Community Schools

Good morning Chair Treyger, Chair Levin and members of the Education and General Welfare Committees here today. My name is Christopher Caruso and I am the Senior Executive Director of the Office of the Community Schools in the Department of Education (DOE). I am joined today by Sarah Jonas, soon to be the Acting Senior Executive Director of Community Schools. As some of you know, I will be transitioning from DOE in approximately one week. Sarah has been my partner in this work since the Office of Community Schools was created six years ago, and I have no doubt that she will carry on this important work with fidelity. Also joining me is Michael Hickey, Executive Director of Students in Temporary Housing (STH) at the DOE, Lauren Siciliano, DOE's Chief Administrative Officer, Dr. Jo Ann Benoit Senior Executive Director in the Division of the First Chancellor, Jodi Sammons Chen from the Office of Pupil Transportation, and Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner of Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social Services (DSS). We are pleased to be here today to discuss the City's work to support students in temporary housing and the proposed legislation.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Chairs Treyger and Levin for your continued leadership throughout the pandemic and all that you have done on behalf of our students and families. I would also like to thank the many advocates, nonprofits, and city agency partners that continue to support our students in shelter.

Supporting our students living in temporary housing, and particularly our students in shelter, has been a top priority of this administration. We recognize that students in temporary housing face distinct challenges and needs that have been further impacted over the last year. The pandemic has had the greatest impact on students with the greatest needs and our STH have faced immense trauma during this time. We have worked hard to provide targeted supports aimed at addressing their needs and keeping them connected with their school communities.

We do this work with close cooperation, leadership, and guidance from DSS, and especially the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The DOE's STH team has a close working relationship with their DHS colleagues. In addition to frequent email and phone exchanges, executive leadership from DOE and DHS have been meeting every two weeks with senior members of our teams to discuss policy, operations, and training on a wide range of related issues. Those include improving attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism, informing families in shelter of important DOE services and opportunities, and ensuring DOE personnel are able to meet with all new families seeking to enter the shelter system through PATH.

As part of the DOE's realignment three years ago, the Students in Temporary Housing Team was placed in the Office of Community Schools, as part of the newly formed Division of School Climate and Wellness. This was done with two very purposeful goals in mind:

- First, to apply the proven successes of the community school strategy in providing students and families with the right supports at the right time. According to a recent RAND study, our impact on improving credit accumulation and decreasing chronic absenteeism was even more pronounced among students who reside in temporary housing.
- Second, to make sure those supports were delivered in alignment with the ultimate goal of the Division of School Climate and Wellness: making sure that all students, no matter who they are and what they might be dealing with in their lives outside of school, feel safe, welcome, and supported in their school community, while experiencing school as a second home where they could truly thrive.

It was fortunate that this intentional alignment between our community school strategy and our supports for students living in temporary housing was in place during the pandemic. Schools offering specific and targeted supports had built trust with these students and families, and were able to quickly get them important resources when the crisis was most severe.

For example, in the South Bronx, Gabriel Hernández Community School Director at MS 223 and his CBO Areté Education partnered with Principal Ramon Gonzalez to alleviate student and family barriers to learning once COVID-19 hit. They focused on the whole family and ensuring that all families had STEM and Arts kits in their homes to engage in hands-on-learning. They coordinated food support, eliminated barriers students may experience in the way of remote learning, supported families with accessing benefits, offered wellness workshops, and started a hotline for families to call in for support.

The DOE applied this same approach for homeless students across the City during the pandemic, first taking into account the most obvious needs: devices and tech support. To date, DOE has distributed a total of 470,000 iPads with data plans, which we prioritized for homeless students first. Nearly 14,000 iPads were delivered to all students in shelter within the first two weeks of schools going remote last spring, and over 50,000 total have been delivered to all Students in Temporary Housing. At present, there is no backlog of students awaiting devices, and we have continued to work with new families as they arrive in shelter to get them devices as quickly as possible. In addition, every student in shelter was given headphones to connect to their devices to make the experience of remote learning more accessible.

We also created several ways for families affected by homelessness to access technological support for remote learning. Those include a dedicated tech support hotline with full translation access for STH, in-person tech support available to shelters, and options to swap out LTE service providers from T-Mobile to Verizon to improve data access. Any student or family residing in a shelter who reports a connectivity problem to the DOE Help Desk will receive a response within 24 hours.

In addition, the City is working with Charter and Altice to provide Wi-Fi service to all apartments in existing DHS shelters expected to be in use beyond 2021 that serve families with children. Planned new families-with-children shelters that are opening under the *Turning the Tide* plan will also be included. Moreover, the City will provide Wi-Fi service to all apartments in more than 40 Human Resources Administration (HRA) domestic violence shelters serving families with children. In total, this represents over 200 sites, comprising approximately 10,500 units.

Beyond devices and technology, we also wanted to understand what other supports our families in temporary housing needed most during the pandemic. Within the first month of remote learning, we conducted a survey of DOE personnel working directly with students and families affected by homelessness, including principals, social workers, parent coordinators, guidance counselors, and Community School Directors. Our teams made an enormous effort to make contact with STH students to determine what the main issues facing those students were.

They found that some of the most common concerns included the need for mental health supports and trauma-informed care for students, as well as other essential benefits such as emergency meals. Knowing this, we were able to make both of these services a priority for our families. We've established clear protocols for conducting remote tele-therapy with hundreds of social workers, made mental health support and trauma-informed training for staff a priority, and worked with our Food and Nutrition Services team to make millions of meals available—especially at sites that serve STH families. These efforts include food delivery and pick up arrangements with specific shelters. Additional guidance, training, and engagement efforts have evolved as we have learned lessons from our data and experiences.

With the strong advocacy of the City Council, this administration has made significant investments in supporting students in temporary housing. Our guiding principle has been to give schools the resources to build their capacity to meet the differentiated needs of their students.

As you are aware, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires school districts to take action to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success in school attributable to homelessness. Chancellor's Regulations (CR) A-101 and A-780 outline the DOE's obligations in this regard. Under McKinney-Vento, students identified as living in temporary housing include those living in family shelters, doubled up with family or friends due to economic hardship, or in other temporary housing conditions that are not safe or stable.

In the 2019-2020 school year, we had just under 100,000 students in our system who experienced homelessness and over 20,000 students spent time living in DHS shelters. Almost every school in New York City has students who have experienced homelessness. This is a reality that every school in our system must be equipped to address. We also know that the numbers of students experiencing homelessness are not evenly distributed across every school, with a subset of schools serving a disproportionate number of students in temporary housing.

We understand that we cannot take a "one size fits all" approach to supporting these students and families. To advance equity and most effectively respond to the universal reality of homelessness in NYC schools, we have made the deepest investments in schools that serve the greatest numbers of students. In schools with at least 50 students living in shelter (and usually at least the same number living doubled up), we have hired full-time staff focused on supporting STH.

We now have 100 Bridging the Gap (BTG) Social Workers in 100 schools. BTG Social Workers are first and foremost dedicated to supporting the mental needs of STH through direct counseling, group therapy, and even school-wide culture and climate initiatives to de-stigmatize homelessness. They also provide

non-clinical supports, assessing student and family needs while helping them access public benefits and free support services available in the school or larger community. In the summer, BTGs can also work directly in shelters conducting intakes and supporting families with issues like enrollment, transportation, and access to DOE services like NYC Schools Account (NYCSA).

We also have 107 STH Community Coordinators in 103 Schools. Sixty-two of these schools have both Coordinators and BTG Social Workers on site due to very high needs. Like BTGs, Community Coordinators work to identify every student affected by homelessness in the school, assess their needs, and facilitate access to supports and services available in the school and community.

Finally, the DOE has 117 STH Family Assistants who work in the family shelter system. Family Assistants meet with every family as they enter shelter, and during their intake process assess family needs, ensure families are connected to enrollment, transportation, and other DOE supports, track families as they move from temporary to permanent housing, and coordinate communication with schools and other DOE offices.

All these STH-dedicated support staff are supported by a team of a dozen Regional Managers: experts in navigating the DOE who are trainers, problem solvers, coaches, and leaders for the school- and shelter-based staff.

Last September, we knew that despite the challenges of reopening schools for in-person learning, it was especially critical to get as many of our most vulnerable students safely back into school buildings. For many of our students in temporary housing, the school community is among the steadiest, most reliable aspect of their lives, with people and resources they can count on. This remains the case even for the majority of our STH who remain in remote learning. We are thrilled, though, that over 26,000 of our students in temporary housing are currently learning in person.

During this period of remote and blended learning, we knew that we had to provide schools with significantly more guidance and resources than usual, and the STH team has attempted to meet these needs in a number of ways. For example, the STH team created written guidance for schools to address four key questions that we heard repeatedly. And we offered schools clear protocols for working with Bridging the Gap Social Workers, STH Community Coordinators, and School-Based STH Liaisons to connect with students who were missing or attending online infrequently in their school.

The first question that we heard was: “How can my school tell if a student is living in shelter or doubled up?” In order to address this, we provided step-by-step guidance on using existing DOE data to understand and act on up-to-date student housing information.

Next, schools asked: “What strategies could I deploy to reach students living in shelter?” The pandemic has placed a spotlight on disparities that existed long before. Students affected by homelessness face unique barriers that are reflected in their low attendance, high rates of chronic absenteeism, and challenges to academic progress. During COVID-19, STH staff were trained and supported to conduct multi-component wellness check-ins with students and families in temporary housing.

The third question was: “How can I contact students who are living doubled up?” Because many families affected by homelessness move frequently, and experience disruptions to phone and email services, we shared best practices culled from the most experienced members of the STH team to locate and communicate consistently. These could include networking through trusted teachers and friends at the school, and checking in using social media.

Lastly, schools asked: “Once we have located the student, what resources are available to support them?” For many families, we knew that essential needs would be a major consideration, and this portion of the guidance provided details on accessing emergency food, health, and mental health services, as well as other free public benefits. And every student in shelter was automatically enrolled in the Learning Bridges program.

Along with this guidance, in partnership with five other city agencies including the HRA, DHS, Administration of Children’s Services, Department of Youth and Community Development, and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, we created a simple website called the Benefits Navigator that provides quick links to the most commonly requested public benefits and services. This site is widely popular not just with families, but with the staff who support these families, for quickly locating community-specific services for referral.

In order to ensure the guidance and services were put into action on the ground, we worked with schools to engage their dedicated School-Based STH Liaison and staff focused on supporting STH. We significantly expanded and improved our annual McKinney Vento training on STH, creating a fully online, self-paced curriculum. We also dramatically expanded the annual #STHAchieve Conference, an annual event for DOE employees focused on sharing knowledge about promising practices, partnerships, and resources, hosting some 1,000 DOE employees in 90 workshop sessions over three days. Furthermore, our Borough and Citywide Offices have been providing training and resources on best practices for teachers. We will be building upon this work throughout the Spring and into next year.

In addition, one of the major long-term areas we have been focused on in supporting STH has been transportation. We have worked with many stakeholders, including families and advocates, gathering extensive feedback on necessary improvements in transportation for STH. Based on this work, we updated our Chancellor’s Regulations to clarify the DOE’s commitment to provide free transportation supports to all K-6 students living in shelter, and expanded related transportation supports. We have implemented more effective communication with families, schools, and shelters, reduced wait time between requests for busing and routing and added additional staff to address STH exception requests.

As we look ahead, I want to thank the Council for your continued advocacy on behalf of the City for stimulus and State funding. Now, with the full stimulus funding in addition to the full funding of Foundation Aid, we can deepen our investments to begin to tackle the lasting impacts of the pandemic, building on our commitment to address the needs of all of our students, including our students in temporary housing, who have gone through incredible challenges over the past year.

I would now like to turn it over to Sarah Jonas to provide information on our plans for the summer and our efforts going forward.

Testimony of Sarah Jonas, Acting Senior Executive Director, Office of the Community Schools

Thank you, Chris and good morning Chairs Treyger and Levin. My name is Sarah Jonas and as Chris has stated I will soon be taking over as Acting Senior Executive Director of the Office of Community Schools. Since this is my first hearing before the City Council, I would like to share a little bit about my background. I have spent my career in education, starting as a teacher and then a Community School Director. And prior to joining DOE, I was a Senior Director at the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools where I helped districts locally and nationally implement community school initiatives. I am excited to take on this new role at such a critical moment and am looking forward to continuing the strong partnership that the Office of Community Schools has maintained with the City Council in the pursuit of delivering impactful programs and supports for our students.

As the Mayor and Chancellor announced on Tuesday, the Summer Rising program is a bold vision for summer learning that will be student-centered, experiential, academically rigorous and culturally responsive and sustaining. We know that this summer is critical to ensure continued learning, to build trust, and to create space for young people to re-connect and re-engage with one another. Summer Rising will provide opportunities for young people in grades K-12, including STH and other vulnerable students most impacted by the pandemic, to learn, to get outside, and engage with peers and caring adults in safe, supervised, and culturally responsive programs, while readying them for a return to school in September 2021.

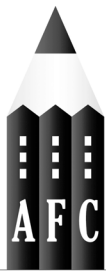
In a testament to the success of NYC Community Schools, Summer Rising will be grounded in the core features of the community school strategy--offering academics, enrichment and social emotional support through robust partnerships between schools and trusted community-based organizations. Summer Rising will integrate the DOE's academic supports and the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) school-based enrichment programming to create a comprehensive summer program, including full-day, full-week programs for students in grades K-5, during this most critical summer for New York City students.

Moving forward, our biggest priority for all our students, but especially those in temporary housing, is making sure we are addressing the academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs they may be facing as a result of the disruptions and stresses caused by the pandemic. This is why we are providing targeted supports for those hardest hit communities with 27 new community schools and 150 additional social workers, as well as a universal framework for assessing and addressing gaps in academic learning.

Let me briefly now turn to the proposed legislation. Intro No. 139 requires the addition of health data for students in temporary housing as part of a Department of Health report. We, along with our colleagues at the Department of Health, support the goal of greater understanding of the health needs of all of our students. Intro No. 150 requires the formation of a task force to study transportation as it relates to students in temporary housing. We support the goals of this bill as well and continue to work diligently and with many stakeholders on the issue of STH transportation. We look forward to further discussions with Council on both of these bills.

While we recognize that the past year has been extremely challenging for students and families, the DOE's commitment to our students in temporary housing, and specifically our students in shelter, has been unwavering throughout this trying time. We testify here today to share the highlights and lessons learned from our shared experiences, and to recognize that there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done. The Administration remains committed to knowing and meeting the needs of our students in shelter. We will continue to build on the investments that we have made with the partnership of the Council in order to better serve our students in shelter across the city. I am appreciative of the opportunity to serve in this role and look forward to working with you to expand the community school strategy, serve all of our students well, and help every student to reach their full potential.

Thank you, and we are happy to address any questions you may have.



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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

Re: Youth in Shelter and the School System

April 16, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York. For 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. We are proud to house NYS-TEACHS, the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, which works on several thousand cases each year regarding the educational needs of students in temporary housing in New York.

Despite the hard work of many educators and DOE staff members, including the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Office, the pandemic has worsened the inequities that have long existed for students in shelter. Over the course of the pandemic, we have heard from families in shelter about students having to wait months to receive an iPad; students whose iPads did not work properly due to lack of Wi-Fi and adequate cellular reception in shelter units; students who had difficulty focusing on schoolwork while trying to complete assignments in small rooms that they shared with their parents and multiple siblings of varying ages, grade levels, and needs; and students whose instruction or special education services were not effective over a screen.

In January 2021, the only month for which the DOE has released disaggregated attendance data this school year, students living in shelter had by far the lowest attendance rate of any student group: 75.7%, 15.1 percentage points lower than the rate for their permanently-housed peers, with even lower attendance rates at the high school level. Tenth graders in shelter had an attendance rate of just 64%, meaning they missed one out of every three school days. We continue to call on the City to use attendance data to reach out to all families of students in shelter who have not been regularly engaging in remote learning and identify and resolve the barriers that are keeping them from participating in school.

Given the significant systemic roadblocks students in shelter faced during the pandemic, the City should keep the needs of students in shelter front and center as it decides how to use the billions of dollars of COVID-19 education relief funding it is

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receiving from the federal government. A number of the recommendations in the City Council's response to the preliminary budget – such as summer programming, small group tutoring, evidence-based literacy curriculum, compensatory services for students with disabilities, and social workers – will be critical for students in shelter. But, as we saw in the case of iPads, merely offering resources to all students, or even giving students in shelter priority for resources, is not sufficient to ensure students in shelter have meaningful access. Rather, to ensure students in shelter can access supports, the City needs an intentional, targeted plan. For example, when it comes to the City's new Summer Rising program and any other supplemental programming, such as tutoring, that will be offered next year, the City should:

- conduct intensive, strengths-based outreach to ensure families in shelter know about the services and get support signing up;
- listen and respond to any concerns parents in shelter may have and connect them with other professionals who can provide additional information as requested;
- provide door-to-door transportation for all services including any that take place outside regular school hours;
- provide summer services and tutoring on site at shelters that have space available; and
- ensure that there is a remote option with sufficient support for families, including IT support, language access, and accommodations for students with disabilities.

Some of this intentional planning will require targeting resources specifically to students in shelter, especially at a time when the DOE will be receiving more than \$6 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding. For example, AFC has recommended that the DOE hire a corps of professionals to focus on outreach and engagement. Given the number of students in shelter who have not been regularly attending school, the DOE should include as part of this corps at least 150 shelter-based community coordinators to focus specifically on helping students in shelter connect with school and access any supplemental programming, services, and supports the DOE will be offering.

With respect to Intro. 150-2018, we support this bill, which would establish a task force on transportation for students who are homeless. We appreciate that, more than five years ago, Mayor de Blasio announced that the City would guarantee bus service for all kindergarten through sixth grade students living in shelters and that the DOE codified this policy in Chancellor's Regulations. This landmark change has provided an important protection for thousands of students living in shelter, helping ensure they have regular and consistent access to school. However, we continue to see challenges around school transportation for students living in shelters, including



transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters, transportation during conditional shelter placements, transportation for 3-K and pre-K students living in shelter, and transportation for students living in shelter who wish to participate in after-school or summer programs. A task force can help address these issues. To make the bill as effective as possible, we recommend specifying in the bill some of the topics that the task force should address. We are attaching a mark-up of the bill with our suggestions.

We want to thank the City Council – and especially Chairs Levin and Treyger – for the leadership you have shown in standing up for students in shelter, drawing attention to their needs, and fighting for targeted resources such as Bridging the Gap social workers. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure students in shelter can participate in school and get the academic and social-emotional support they need after the disruption and devastation of the past year.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Recommendations from Advocates for Children of New York re: Int. No. 150

Int. No. 150

A Local Law in relation to a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. a. Definitions. For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

Family assistant. The term “family assistant” means department of education staff assigned to work with shelters and schools to assist homeless families with obtaining transportation assistance and other services for which they are eligible.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means temporary emergency housing provided to homeless individuals and families by the department of homeless services, the department of social services, the human resources administration, the department of housing preservation and development, or a provider under contract or similar agreement with such departments.

b. There shall be a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students consisting of at least ~~nine~~nineteen members. Members of the task force shall be appointed by the mayor after consultation with the speaker of the council. Such task force shall include the following members:

1. the deputy chancellor for school climate and wellness of the city school district, or their designee, who shall serve as chair;

2. the administrator of the department ~~commissioner~~ of homeless services, or their designee, ~~who shall serve as chair;~~

~~23.~~ the commissioner of the department of social services, or their designee;

~~the deputy chancellor for operations of the city school district, or their designee;~~

4. the executive director of the office of pupil transportation of the city school district, or their designee;

5. the executive director of the office of domestic violence and emergency intervention services of the human resources administration, or their designee;

6. the commissioner of the department of housing preservation and development, or their designee;

7. the chairperson of the city council committee on general welfare, or their designee, and the chairperson of the city council committee on education, or their designee;

8. 4. at least two family assistants and at least one ~~content expert~~ regional manager from the students in temporary housing office of the city school district;

9. at least two representatives of organizations which provide shelter for families with children; and

10. at least two representatives of advocacy organizations with relevant expertise;

11. at least two representatives of ~~a~~ companies which provide busing services to students;
and

12. at least two parents of students who are currently or were formerly living in shelter.

c. All members of the task force shall serve without compensation and at the pleasure of the mayor. Any vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment. All members shall be appointed within 60 days of the enactment of this local law.

d. The task force shall meet at least quarterly and shall submit a report of its recommendations to the mayor and the speaker of the council no later than 12 months after the final member of the task force is appointed. Such report shall include an assessment of the barriers

to arranging transportation, including bus service, MetroCards, and other forms of transportation, for students living in shelter and recommendations for addressing such barriers. The topics covered by the report shall include, but not be limited, to the following topics:

1. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation during conditional shelter placements;

2. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students found eligible for shelter;

3. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students transitioning from shelter to permanent housing for the remainder of the school year;

4. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation, including prompt provision of public transit passes for systems outside of New York City, for students who are temporarily residing outside of New York City or for students who were homeless, have secured permanent housing outside of New York City, and continue enrollment in New York City for the remainder of the school year;

5. interagency protocols to ensure reimbursement for transportation expenses when transportation has not been promptly arranged for students in temporary housing;

6. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters that ensure the safety of such students and that confidential information is not improperly disclosed;

7. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelter who are enrolled in 3-K, Pre-K, Head Start, preschool special education classes, or preschool special classes in integrated settings, and for preschool students with disabilities living

in shelter receiving related services when related services are provided at a related services agency outside the home or preschool setting; and

85. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelters so that they may participate in extracurricular activities, including COMPASS and other after-school and summer programs.

e. Annual reports on the implementation of such recommendations shall be submitted to the mayor and the council no later than 12 and 24 months following the submission of the initial report, after which the task force will cease to exist.~~The task force shall cease to exist upon the publication of the report required pursuant to subdivision d.~~

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.



TESTIMONY OF:

Melissa Accomando – Senior Staff Attorney, Education Practice

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before the New York City Council

Committee on Education and Committee on General Welfare

Hearing on Youth in Shelter and the School System

April 16, 2021

My name is Melissa Accomando. I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Education Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS provides innovative, multi-disciplinary, and client-centered criminal, family, and immigration defense, as well as civil legal services for nearly 30,000 people in Brooklyn every year. We thank the City Council Committees on Education and General Welfare and Chairs Treyger and Levin for holding this important hearing on youth in shelter and the school system.

BDS is fortunate to have the support of the City Council to supplement the services we provide as a public defender office in Brooklyn. Through specialized units of the office, we provide extensive wrap-around services that meet the needs of traditionally under-served clients in a comprehensive way. This includes helping young people and their families navigate the public education bureaucracy during and after contact with the criminal legal and family court systems.

Our Education Unit delivers legal representation and informal advocacy to our school-age clients and to parents of children in New York City schools. Many of the families we serve are involved in the criminal legal system or in Family Court proceedings. In addition, a significant number of the students we work with qualify as “over-age and under-credited” and have been retained at

least one grade. More than half of the students we work with are classified as students with disabilities. As an interdisciplinary legal and social work team, we work to improve our clients' access to education, and a significant portion of our advocacy relates to special education, school discipline, reentry, and alternative pathways to graduation.

Background

Our staff has witnessed first-hand the trauma and instability often experienced by young people in temporary housing. The transition to temporary housing is often stressful. Too often, families are removed from their familiar neighborhoods and placed in shelters or other temporary living arrangements in areas far from their communities, classmates and extended family. Shelter conditions can be unclean and unsafe. Many families are moved to shelters without cooking facilities.

The process of entering the shelter system can be confusing and some families must navigate the application process multiple times before they are deemed eligible. Families who do not initially qualify for temporary housing may have to return to DHS's Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center again and again, pulling their children out of school to make the long trip to the Bronx, and enduring multiple "provisional placements" before learning where they will ultimately end up.

School-age children living in shelters or temporary housing experience particular hardships. The disruption caused by a family losing its home is evident in its impact on a child's access to school. After navigating the often-lengthy process of being placed in a shelter, a student's once local school may only be accessible by long and unsustainable commutes. Though DHS policy states that families are supposed to be placed in shelters close to the school of the youngest child in the family, due to the massive overcrowding of the shelter system, families are often placed far from schools. Additionally, many families face overbroad restrictions due to domestic violence or other safety concerns, where they are "precluded" from being placed in shelters in large areas – often entire boroughs. Families are then faced with the choice of enrolling their children in unfamiliar schools near the shelters or remaining in their home schools but enduring long commutes.

While families struggle to bring their children to school and consider the possibility of school transfers, students face days or weeks of tardiness and absences, only compounding the problems they experience. Though the City has guaranteed transportation assistance to all students living in temporary housing, this assistance often comes in the form of MetroCards given to students and parents. The burden is thus placed on parents to bring their children to school – often over long distances to different boroughs, and sometimes involving multiple children being brought to different schools. These commutes on public transportation are even more difficult for students with disabilities. Physical or behavioral disabilities can make long commutes even more burdensome – and sometimes impossible.

When school bus service is available, there are often delays – of weeks or even months – in getting this service set up. Obtaining bus service for a student in temporary housing requires having multiple forms filled out by shelter staff and school staff, having those forms submitted to the Office of Pupil Transportation, and then waiting up to 10 days for a bus route to be assigned. And that is only if all the paperwork is filled out correctly and a bus route is available. BDS frequently works with parents who have attempted to obtain busing for their children and have been waiting for weeks to have busing put into place, either because shelter staff have failed to properly complete forms, or because DOE refuses to put busing in place when families have not yet received a permanent shelter placement. And when busing is eventually put into place, some students endure exceedingly long commutes on buses that make numerous stops before delivering children to school.

Our office worked with one mother who sought busing for her 5-year-old son to transport him from Manhattan to Brooklyn. She was repeatedly given inaccurate information about how to request busing, and her shelter caseworker did not properly complete the forms necessary to secure busing. Our office got involved to assist with the busing request. But once the request was approved, she learned that her son would likely be on the bus for an hour-and-a-half each way. Knowing her son experiences carsickness, and worried about the long ride, she instead decided to transport him herself on the subway – over an hour each way. Because of this commute, it is difficult for her to look for permanent employment. She has contemplated moving him to a school closer to the shelter – but she expects to return to Brooklyn as soon as she can find permanent housing, and worries about transferring him, only to move him again when she finds an apartment.

School stability is incredibly important for all students – but especially those experiencing housing instability.¹ Staying in the same school allows students to maintain relationships with teachers, school staff and friends, providing security and stability while they experience the upheaval of entering the shelter system. School stability, through a transfer to a shelter close to the child’s home school or school bus transportation, is often only available when a family is working with an advocate who can help the family navigate the system – and even then, is often unattainable or impractical.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Problems experienced by students living in temporary housing have been particularly acute this year, when many students had to contend with learning remotely. Though students living in temporary housing were supposed to be prioritized for receiving data-enabled devices to allow them to log into their classes, our office has worked with families living in shelters who waited months to receive devices. And even when families received these devices, they struggled to log

¹ See, e.g., John W. Fantuzzo, Whitney A. LeBoeuf, et al., “The Unique and Combined Effects of Homelessness and School Mobility on the Educational Outcomes of Young Children,” 41 *Educational Researcher* 393-402 (2012).

into classes due to poor mobile-data connections and limited or no wireless internet in many shelter buildings.

One of our clients who spent much of this school year in a hotel shelter told us that she begged the shelter staff to give her access to the hotel WiFi, because her child's remote learning device could not pick up a cellular signal. For weeks, shelter staff told her that she was not permitted to use the WiFi. When she finally was granted access, the WiFi was so slow that she was unable to log her child in. Fearing what would happen if her child was marked absent from school every day, she ultimately reached an agreement with her child's school that he would be marked present if she could document any interaction with the school – a text message or an email would suffice. While she is grateful that he is not being marked absent, she is understandably concerned that by the fall he will essentially have missed over a year of learning.

We are pleased that the City has finally committed to installing WiFi in all shelters housing school-aged children – something that should have happened even before the COVID-19 pandemic – and grateful to the organizations that brought a lawsuit to hold the City accountable for providing wireless access in shelters. However, many students living in temporary housing have lost over a year of school. The City must come up with a plan to provide compensatory education services to those students who have missed so much school this past year, including those living in temporary housing.

Brooklyn Defender Services believes that improved collaboration between the relevant city agencies, namely Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), is essential to positively impact the educational stability of students in temporary housing, and to ensure that they receive the education to which they are entitled. The remainder of my testimony will provide recommendation to increase school stability and supports for students who are experiencing housing instability or living in DHS shelters.

Recommendations

As the City begins to plan the future of school following this unprecedented year, there is an opportunity to prioritize the needs of children who have been disproportionately impacted by gaps in access to school this year, and to ensure that students newly experiencing housing instability can maintain school stability whenever possible. To ensure young people in shelter's needs are prioritized, we offer the following suggestions:

- 1. Clarify the Shelter Placement and Transfer Process to Ensure Families Can Be Placed Near Existing Schools Whenever Possible.**

Increased attention must be given to ensure families are placed in their home borough, and near their children's schools, upon initial admission to PATH. Regularly, our clients contact us after

applying to PATH to notify us that they were placed in an unfamiliar borough. For example, despite informing the staff at PATH that their child's school is in Brooklyn, they receive a placement in Manhattan or the Bronx.

DHS and DOE, along with other relevant agencies, must create a more streamlined process to ensure that families can reside in a shelter close to their children's schools and ensure that sufficient space exists in the shelter system to allow families to be placed in locations convenient to schools. When faced with the decision of a lengthy commute to school or a transfer to a closer school, parents often do not feel they have any option but to transfer their child to the local school, compromising their school stability and disrupting their child's learning. But we are hopeful that DHS can create an easier and more transparent process where families can be initially placed in shelters so children can remain in their original schools. Through advocacy, BDS can often assist families in transferring to shelters near their children's school. However, not all families have access to an advocate or attorney and ensuring families are placed in shelters near their child's school should not require case by case advocacy. DHS should also adopt a formal policy giving families the right to a transfer if their initial placement is not convenient to a child's school and laying out the process by which they can seek the transfer.

Take School Location into Account for Provisional Shelter Placements.

When families apply for shelter through PATH, they are almost never placed immediately. Instead, the family is given a provisional shelter placement while their eligibility for permanent shelter is investigated. While DHS policy indicates that families are supposed to be placed near the location of the youngest child's school, no similar policy exists for provisional shelter placements. What is more, even though provisional placement is supposed to last only 10 days, families are often in provisional placements for much longer for reasons outside their control, as when investigations take longer than 10 days to conduct. Knowing that the provisional placement is not permanent, families do not want to switch their children's school during this provisional period. Placing families in provisional placements near children's school would help to avoid unnecessary disruption to the children's attendance.

Ensure that Preclusions Are More Limited so that Families Are Not Prevented from Living in Large Areas of the City.

When DHS determines that there is a safety reason why a family cannot be placed near their former home or children's schools, they should limit the size of the area in which the family is precluded from living. For example, if a family is precluded from living in one neighborhood in Brooklyn, it should not necessarily follow that the family cannot live *anywhere* in Brooklyn. DHS should work with the family to ensure they are placed somewhere they feel safe, but – when possible – that will also allow for a reasonable commute to the children's school. DHS should also give applicants a formal means of contesting the preclusion. For instance, applicants

should be able to choose to prioritize placement near a school or another convenient location if they feel it is safe, especially because in many cases the family will continue to travel to the area near the school to bring the children to school.

Make Permanent COVID-19 Rules that Do Not Require School-Aged Children to Attend PATH Intake and Follow-Up Meetings.

Historically, all members of a family were required to be present during the PATH application process, and for any follow-up meetings. Thus, parents had to pull children out of school in order to go with them to PATH. During the COVID-19 pandemic, PATH has suspended the requirement to bring children to meetings at PATH – and this suspension should be made permanent. There is no reason that children should miss school in order to attend meetings at PATH. Our office has worked with families who have had to return to PATH time and time again when their eligibility for shelter was questioned, and their children missed days or even weeks of school.

2. Ensure Accessible and Practical School Transportation to Maintain School Stability

Accessible and reliable transportation is a crucial tool towards securing school stability for students in temporary housing. We appreciate that DOE has made bus service available to many students living in temporary housing. However, many other students in temporary housing remain without school bus transportation, either because their families are given MetroCards instead of being provided bus service, or because they have not been able to navigate the labyrinthian bureaucracies of DHS and the DOE in order to get bus service in place.

In New York City, where transportation can involve multiple transfers in all forms of weather, providing a family with MetroCards can be an impractical and unsustainable option, especially for younger children. Without feasible transportation options, parents often feel their only choice is to transfer their child to a nearby school, disrupting school stability. DHS and DOE, along with other relevant agencies, must create a quicker and more transparent process to secure yellow bus travel for students.

Additionally, parents are not kept informed of the process for obtaining bus service and other transportation assistance. DHS and DOE should work together to create a transparent policy, including a timeline, to ensure eligible families receive sustainable transportation options so students can remain in their home schools.

We are encouraged by Council's Int. 150-2018 to create a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students; however, this legislation has been pending for several years while the issue of ensuring transportation to students experiencing homelessness persists. The Council should act swiftly to identify ways to address barriers to arranging transportation for students.

Make Bus Service Available to More Students in Temporary Housing.

As detailed above, we often work with parents who are given MetroCards to transport their children to school, instead of bus service, which can be difficult for families who live far from the children's school or parents who have work obligations. When students are placed far from their schools, DOE should ensure that busing is made available for children who are too young to travel to school on their own. The City should also create additional bus routes to ensure that when students in temporary housing are given bus service, that the bus rides are not too long.

Provide Transportation Assistance When Families are in Provisional Shelter Placements.

Families who are placed in provisional shelter placements are told they are ineligible for busing until their shelter placement is made permanent; in the meantime, they may be faced with the impossible decision of keeping their children home from school, traveling a great distance to school by public transportation, or enrolling their children near a shelter placement that may not be permanent. DOE and DHS should provide reimbursement for car service transportation to children's schools until a permanent shelter placement can be obtained, and transportation established. In the alternative, given the fact that many families spend longer than 10 days in provisional placements, DOE should allow busing to be requested for families in provisional placements.

3. Ensure Access to Reliable and High-Speed WiFi in Shelters and Create a Plan to Provide Compensatory Education Services to Students Experiencing Homelessness.

The majority of students in New York City are continuing to attend school remotely. And even when all students return to in-person learning, it is nevertheless essential that students living in shelter have access to reliable high-speed internet. The City should work as quickly as possible to honor the commitment it has made to install wireless internet in all shelters housing school-aged children by the end of the summer.

What is more, students living in shelters have missed a tremendous amount of school since the pandemic began. The DOE must create a plan to provide compensatory services and additional supports to these students so that they do not continue to fall further behind.

Conclusion

Brooklyn Defender Services is grateful to the Committee on Education and the Committee on General Welfare for hosting this hearing and working to address this critical issue. Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments. We look forward to further discussing these and other issues that impact the people we serve. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at maccomando@bds.org or (718) 254-0700 x 378.



Testimony of Raysa S. Rodriguez
Associate Executive Director of Policy and Advocacy
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Presented to the New York City Council
Oversight - Youth in Shelter and the School System.

**Committee on Education
Committee on General Welfare**

April 16, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Raysa Rodriguez and I am the Associate Executive Director of Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 75-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions.

I would like to thank Chair Treyger, Chair Levin and all the members of the Education AND General Welfare committees for holding today's hearing on students in the shelter system.

As of the 2019-20 school year, 111,606 NYC public school students lived in temporary housing. This marks a marginal decrease from 114,085 in 2018-19, although the closure of school buildings in March 2020 likely impeded schools' ability to identify students experiencing homelessness towards the end of the school year. The number of students in temporary housing has remained above 100,000 since 2015-16. Among the 111,606 students in temporary housing (which includes charter and traditional public school students), 73,160 or 66% are living doubled up – temporarily staying with family or neighbors due to material hardship. Approximately 30% (32,778) stay in the NYC shelter system, and 5,326 are unsheltered. Students in the Bronx disproportionately face housing insecurity with 16% of students in the Bronx living in temporary housing throughout the school year compared to 10% of students citywide.¹

This student population will likely continue to grow as a result of the pandemic, due to increased housing and economic insecurity. The challenges faced during a remote school year could not have been greater. Students living in shelters often lacked access to a reliable internet connection, or a personal device of their own, or both. Moreover, they are more likely to lack the adequate physical space necessary to learn remotely, especially if shared with siblings who are also engaged in remote-learning. Students in shelters also need additional adult support, to set up their access or guide them throughout the school day.

¹ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. *Keeping Track Online Database: Students Living in Temporary Housing, 2019-20*. Accessed on April 12, 2021. <https://data.cccnewyork.org/>

With a historic infusion of new state and federal funds, the City's school system has an opportunity to significantly expand and invest in programs and support for students in shelter and other temporary housing situations to support recovery, including targeted academic and mental health services, more shelter-based community coordinators, and better cross-agency coordination. Additionally, while CCC has long supported Intro. 150-2018, we hope it can be further specified and updated to reflect the most pressing and current transportation needs for students living in shelters.

Ensure students living in shelters have full access to all programs and supports as part of an academic recovery effort.

With robust new federal resources on the way that are intended to combat COVID-related learning loss and promote academic recovery, the City and administration have already announced multiple plans. These include the 2021 Student Achievement Plan last December, and the recent announcement of the Summer Rising summer academic enrichment program. Both of these plans have yet to mention students living in temporary housing including shelters. The City must prioritize and target students living in shelters when designing, enrolling, and implementing support programs. For example, for the Summer Rising program the DOE should engage in active outreach and enrollment in shelters with school-age children, train shelter staff on how parents can enroll, and provide door-to-door transportation for students living in shelter to and from the summer sites. Additionally, any extra-curricular programs that may be a part of stimulus-funded recovery efforts, whether its afterschool tutoring or recreation, must ensure they provide transportation after school hours for students living in shelters. As part of an education recovery effort, the city should also explore providing services onsite in family shelters, including tutoring or other educational programming.

Hire additional staff, both in shelters and centrally, specifically to serve students and families living in the shelter system.

While the population of students in temporary housing and students living in shelters has increased, the number of shelter-based DOE family assistants has remained the same. Meanwhile, as the pandemic forced students to attend school remotely, students living in shelters consistently had some of the lowest remote attendance and interaction rates. Its clear more needs to be done onsite at shelters to support families, both now and in the future.

Along with our partners in the Family Homelessness Coalition, we call on the DOE to use the new resources at its disposal to hire an additional 150 community coordinators to work in shelters with school-age children, to help families navigate DOE systems, enrollment, teacher interaction, and coordinate other educational supports. Additionally, while the DOE has thankfully staffed central positions dedicated to students in temporary housing during the pandemic, significant vacancies remain that should be filled immediately including one outstanding Regional Manager position for students in temporary housing, a director of policy and a director of capacity-building. These vacant director positions were crucial during the pandemic in terms of device distribution and interagency coordination relevant to the needs of students in shelters.

In addition to these DOE positions, we also support calls for a position within the Mayoral administration focused specifically on the needs of students in temporary housing. A City Hall-based position who liaises with both the DOE and DHS could better foster interagency coordination, and combat challenges related to lack of information sharing across agencies.

Invest in and expand behavioral health supports for all students and remove police presence from schools.

As a result of COVID-19, children and teens are grappling with unprecedented economic deprivation, housing insecurity, loneliness, disrupted and disjointed schooling, and a grave loss of life in their families and local communities. Furthermore, with the transition to distance learning, many children have lost a source of stability and routine and may experience feelings of social isolation and anxiety. Additionally, the shuttering of schools has impaired the ability to identify and connect or maintain continuity of student's access to clinical services. For all of these reasons it is imperative that students' behavioral health is and continues to be a priority for the administration and Dept. of Education.

These mental health impacts could be even greater for students who were already living in shelters, or who unfortunately moved into one during the pandemic, add to that the unique obstacles to remote learning for these students, and the need for behavioral health supports when all they are back in school will be paramount to all students' successful recovery and reengagement.

CCC was pleased to see the FY 22 Preliminary Budget proposal include a \$35 million investment for "Academic Resiliency – Mental Health" but we are interested in seeing more specifics as to how the funds will be spent and what services they will fund. More importantly, it will take a much more robust investment in order to truly make students' mental health and well-being a top priority. Meanwhile, the city cannot prioritize social-emotional learning and recovery while also funding and possibly expanding police presence in schools, which disproportionately harms Black and Brown students and reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline. The administration, Department of Education, and City Council must re-allocate the \$450 million NYPD budget for school policing, and use the new federal stimulus funds ,to take the following actions:

- Hire more trained staff to support students' needs including social workers, behavioral specialists, trauma-informed de-escalation staff, conflict resolution specialists, peacemakers, and school climate and restorative justice staff.
- Fully implement school-wide restorative justice practices and train staff in all schools.
- Fully implement the Mental Health Continuum recommended by 41 organizations and the City Council, which consists of school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics; a call-in center to advise school staff about students in crisis; direct mental health services for students; School-Based Mental Health Clinicians; and whole-school training in Collaborative Problem Solving, an evidence-based, skill-building approach to effectively respond to students' needs.

Expedite Wi-Fi Installation in all Shelters

The City recently settled a lawsuit that orders the a complete the installation of Wi-Fi in every homeless shelter by the end of August 2021.² While CCC is pleased that the project has a court-ordered completion date, we urge the City to do everything possible to complete Wi-Fi installation in shelters before that deadline, and to whatever extent possible to help shelters who are currently providing their own building-wide Wi-Fi through their own means and methods.³ There are still over two months left in the current school year in addition to summer learning months and any family that can have a more reliable internet connect for any amount of time will have a positive impact on students' education.

Pass Intro. 150-2018, but add language to specify the transportation issues students in shelters face.

CCC supports Intro. 150-2018 that would establish a task force on transportation for students who are homeless. However, CCC and its partners recommend additional language that can further specify the issues the taskforce should address. These include but are not limited to transportation for students living in family and domestic violence shelters, transportation during conditional shelter placements, transportation for 3-K and pre-K students living in shelter, and transportation for students living in shelter who wish to participate in after-school or summer programs. Attached to this testimony is a bill mark-up that includes our suggested changes.

Conclusion

As vaccinations efforts ramp up, the city can and should begin to envision and plan for a time when students are back in school buildings for in-person learning. But for students living in shelter, the pandemic only exacerbated their academic needs and they should not merely return to school as it was before. With new state and federal resources, the City and DOE must focus efforts on students experiencing homelessness including those living in shelter and c prioritize them as we turn to recovery.

² Errick, Kristen. "Settlement Reached in NYC Shelter Internet Access Issue," *Law Street Media*. April 7, 2021. <https://lawstreetmedia.com/tech/tech-policy/settlement-reached-in-nyc-shelter-internet-access-lawsuit/>.

³ Newman, Andy. "How the 3 Diallo Sisters were Finally Able to Connect to their Classes," *The New York Times*. January 25, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/25/nyregion/wifi-home-shelters.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.

Recommendations re: Int. No. 150

Int. No. 150

A Local Law in relation to a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. a. Definitions. For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

Family assistant. The term “family assistant” means department of education staff assigned to work with shelters and schools to assist homeless families with obtaining transportation assistance and other services for which they are eligible.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means temporary emergency housing provided to homeless individuals and families by the department of homeless services, the department of social services, the human resources administration, the department of housing preservation and development, or a provider under contract or similar agreement with such departments.

b. There shall be a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students consisting of at least nineteen members. Members of the task force shall be appointed by the mayor after consultation with the speaker of the council. Such task force shall include the following members:

1. the deputy chancellor for school climate and wellness of the city school district, or their designee, who shall serve as chair;

2. the administrator of the department of homeless services, or their designee;

3. the commissioner of the department of social services, or their designee;

4.

4. the executive director of the office of pupil transportation of the city school district, or their designee;

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5. the executive director of the office of domestic violence and emergency intervention services of the human resources administration, or their designee;

6. the commissioner of the department of housing preservation and development, or their designee;

7. the chairperson of the city council committee on general welfare, or their designee, and the chairperson of the city council committee on education, or their designee;

8. at least two family assistants and at least one regional manager from the students in temporary housing office of the city school district;

9. at least two representatives of organizations which provide shelter for families with children;

10. at least two representatives of advocacy organizations with relevant expertise;

11. at least two representatives of companies which provide busing services to students; and

12. at least two parents of students who are currently or were formerly living in shelter.

c. All members of the task force shall serve without compensation and at the pleasure of the mayor. Any vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment. All members shall be appointed within 60 days of the enactment of this local law.

d. The task force shall meet at least quarterly and shall submit a report of its recommendations to the mayor and the speaker of the council no later than 12 months after the final member of the task force is appointed. Such report shall include an assessment of the barriers to arranging transportation, including bus service, MetroCards, and other forms of transportation, for students living in shelter and recommendations for addressing such barriers. The topics covered by the report shall include, but not be limited, to the following topics:

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1. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation during conditional shelter placements;

2. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students found eligible for shelter;

3. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students transitioning from shelter to permanent housing for the remainder of the school year;

4. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation, including prompt provision of public transit passes for systems outside of New York City, for students who are temporarily residing outside of New York City or for students who were homeless, have secured permanent housing outside of New York City, and continue enrollment in New York City for the remainder of the school year;

5. interagency protocols to ensure reimbursement for transportation expenses when transportation has not been promptly arranged for students in temporary housing;

6. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters that ensure the safety of such students and that confidential information is not improperly disclosed;

7. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelter who are enrolled in 3-K, Pre-K, Head Start, preschool special education classes, or preschool special classes in integrated settings, and for preschool students with disabilities living in shelter receiving related services when related services are provided at a related services agency outside the home or preschool setting; and

& interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelters so that they may participate in extracurricular activities, including COMPASS and other after-school and summer programs.

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e. Annual reports on the implementation of such recommendations shall be submitted to the mayor and the council no later than 12 and 24 months following the submission of the initial report, after which the task force will cease to exist.

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§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

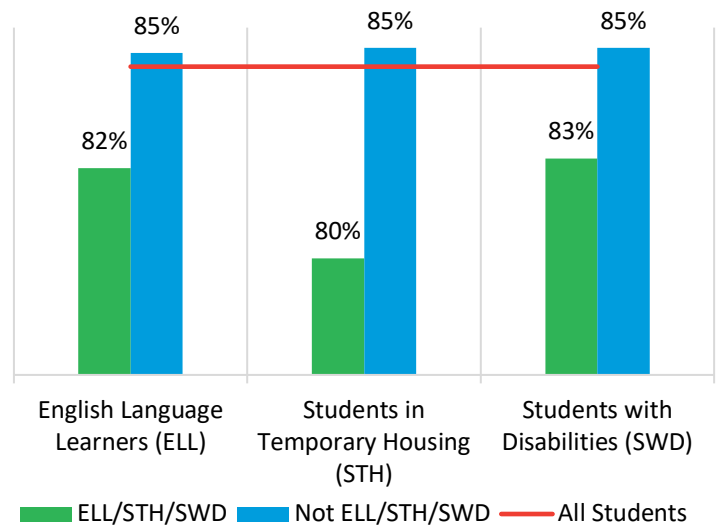
REMOTE LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Daryl Hornick-Becker, Sophia Halkitis, and Bijan Kimiagar

As New York City’s school system becomes fully remote due to a rise in COVID-19 cases, City Department of Education data from the Spring - the last time all students learned remotely - is cause for alarm as a significant share of students failed to connect during that period. **Specifically, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students in temporary housing as well as students in districts with high economic insecurity, were most at risk of disconnection and learning loss.** During the Spring 2020 term, the DOE measured remote interactions students and their families had with teachers and staff. An interaction could include: a student’s submission of an assignment, participation in an online chat, response to a call or email, or communication from the family.

Even by this limited measure of engagement, English-language learners, students in temporary housing, and students with disabilities all engaged at lower rates than their peers over the entire Spring remote semester. Each day, on average, 20% of students living in temporary housing did not interact with remote learning, a larger percent disengaged than in any other student group. **There is no mistake, the city must make concerted efforts to focus on these students, by ensuring every child has a device, enabling Wi-Fi or at the least cellular data access in all shelters, creating hot spots in communities, and providing fast and easy-to-access technological support for families.** English-language learners and their families also need better communication and support from the DOE, and students with disabilities and their families require more attention to how they receive required services and supports remotely.

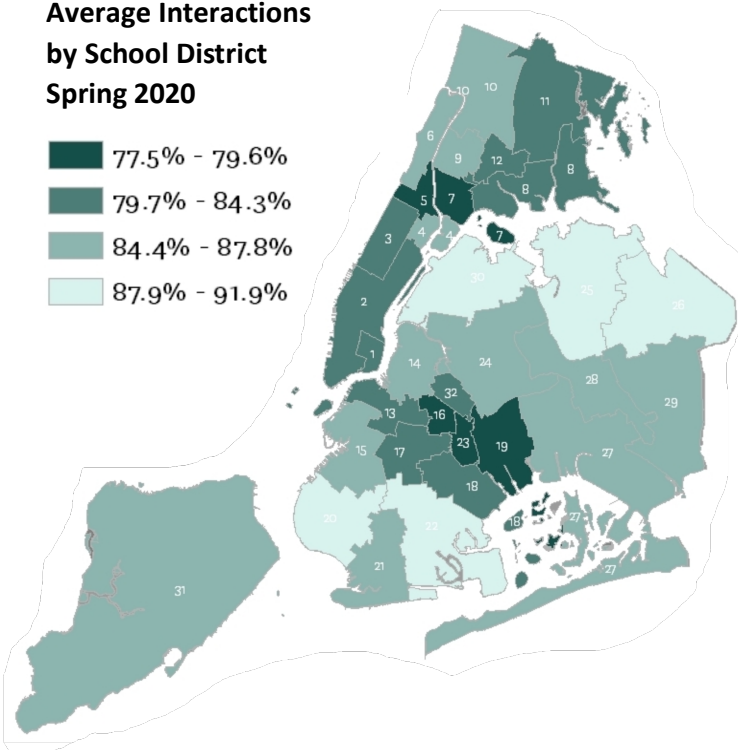
Average Interactions by Student Group



Concerted efforts for device distribution, internet access, and tech-support should also target areas of the city where economic and housing insecurity is great and the digital divide is wide. These communities must also have access to Learning Bridges programs and virtual youth services while schools are closed. When aggregated by school district, interactions during the Spring were lowest in Mott Haven, Brownsville, Central Harlem, East New York, and Bedford Stuyvesant, where on average at least 20% of students each day had no interactions with remote learning.

Average Interactions by School District Spring 2020

- 77.5% - 79.6%
- 79.7% - 84.3%
- 84.4% - 87.8%
- 87.9% - 91.9%



According to estimates from the 2019 American Community Survey:

More than **185,000** school-aged children in NYC have no broadband internet at home.

Approximately **75,000** school-aged children in NYC have internet access but lack a device to learn from.

More than **90,000** school-aged children in NYC have no internet access at all.



Testimony of

Coalition for the Homeless

and

The Legal Aid Society

on

Oversight - Youth in Shelter and the School System

submitted to

The New York City Council's Committees on Education and General Welfare

Giselle Routhier
Policy Director
Coalition for the Homeless

Susan J. Horwitz
Supervising Attorney of the Education Law Project
The Legal Aid Society

Beth Hofmeister
Staff Attorney of the Homeless Rights Project
The Legal Aid Society

April 16, 2021

The Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society welcome this opportunity to submit written testimony to the New York City Council's Committees on Education and General Welfare pertaining to students in shelter.

Homelessness and School-Age Children in NYC

Homeless students already faced daunting challenges prior to the pandemic, but the past year has exacerbated the educational disparities for this vulnerable population. In the 2019-20 school year, there were an estimated 111,600 children in NYC district or charter schools experiencing homelessness, including those living in doubled-up housing situations.¹ Of these children, 32,700 were living in shelters,² with most in shelters operated or contracted by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The staggering scale of student homelessness in New York City demands robust investments in permanent affordable housing to help prevent more families from falling into homelessness and to enable more New Yorkers to move out of shelters. No child should have to grow up in a shelter, but for too long New York has failed to invest in proven solutions to address homelessness that would enable these families to thrive in homes of their own. At the very least, it is imperative that the City ensure that homeless students have the same educational opportunities as their stably housed peers. This is also an issue of racial justice: Children of color are disproportionately represented among the homeless population. With Federal stimulus funding on the way, we urge the City to prioritize necessary supports for homeless students and to ensure they have equitable access to programs and services in the coming months.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning became the new norm, and therefore adequate internet access became a basic requirement for receiving an education. However, homeless New Yorkers are too often denied such access, which can have devastating consequences, especially for school-age children trying to access remote learning from shelters. Although many schools offer blended and in-person learning programs, remote learning remains the only option available for a large number of students staying in shelters because so many homeless children are assigned to shelters far from their schools. Even for schools that continue blended and in-person learning, all students need reliable internet access on the days they are not scheduled for in-person instruction. Moreover, the lack of access to internet coverage is not simply a short-term issue for homeless children, who spend an average of 443 days in DHS shelters with their families.³ The switch to remote learning left homeless students at risk of missing significant portions of the academic year without intervention. Research documenting the impacts of chronic absenteeism not only warns of the potential negative effects on short-term academic performance, but also illustrates the detrimental impact on longer-term achievement outcomes – only further contributing to the cyclical nature of poverty.

E.G. v. The City of New York, et.al.: Guaranteeing Internet Access for Students Sleeping in Shelters

Throughout the past year, The Legal Aid Society and the Coalition for the Homeless have advocated with the City to ensure that homeless students sleeping in shelters are able to access the digital classroom – efforts that culminated in litigation. On March 23, 2020, the New York City public school system began offering only remote learning, requiring students to attend virtual classes and adhere to online homework submission deadlines. While the Department of Education (DOE) partnered with

¹ As reported December 3, 2020, by New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS), a project of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), at <https://advocatesforchildren.org/node/1675>.

² *Id.*

³ https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2021/2021_pmmr.pdf

Apple to provide students with iPads, a large number of the City’s 150 DHS shelters for families with children had not received their shipment of iPads by the first day of school. Even when most of the iPads arrived the following week, students were left struggling to find areas in their shelters with cellular service to make up for their missed week of classes. Students who lived in shelters without internet access reported they scrambled to find local, publicly accessible businesses with free WiFi, or connect to alternate sources of WiFi like NYC Link stations, in order to connect to the internet. Some parents paid for private hotspots, taking much-needed funds from other areas of their budgets to provide a solution where the City provided none. Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society began requesting information from DHS leadership about how the agency and City were planning to better support remote learning going forward.

Absent any discernable movement from the City to develop a comprehensive plan to address these issues, in July 2020, the Coalition for the Homeless provided DHS and DOE with the names of students who had trouble accessing the internet with their DOE-provided iPads. DHS refused to take any responsibility for addressing the problem, insisting that providing WiFi or any broadband internet access was unnecessary because the iPads were cellular enabled. Furthermore, both agencies (DOE and DHS) disregarded recommendations to set up guest WiFi networks in shelters with existing internet to allow students to access classes while T-Mobile – the iPad cellular carrier – worked to address the general connectivity issues. The connectivity issues were not a new problem: During the summer of 2019, the City Bar Justice Center interviewed 84 residents of NYC family shelters in Manhattan and the Bronx, finding that only 6 percent were able to access the internet through their shelters.⁴ Yet, even as the new school year began, DOE and DHS continued to skirt accountability as they failed to coordinate to address those critical issues directly.

On October 8, 2021, the Coalition for the Homeless, along with counsel at The Legal Aid Society and Milbank LLP, sent a letter to then-DOE Commissioner Carranza and DHS Administrator Carter outlining ongoing concerns and demanding an immediate remediation plan to address the total lack of internet access in many shelters that affected thousands of homeless students. This letter threatened imminent litigation absent a specific plan. Despite expressing a desire to provide reliable internet access to students residing in shelters generally by the following summer, the City did not share any specific plan in response to this letter, and the Coalition for the Homeless and counsel moved forward with litigation.

On September 16, 2020, Comptroller Stringer sent a letter to Mayor de Blasio and DOE Chancellor Carranza requesting information and immediate action to address the learning difficulties for all students in temporary housing, including programs overseen by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), as well as DHS and the Human Resources Administration (HRA).⁵ By the time of the New York City Council’s October 13th Committee on Technology and Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises hearing regarding access to the internet, the City still had not provided an accurate assessment to Legal Aid and the Coalition of how many shelters lacked adequate internet services, nor data on how many students had been affected, despite the Comptroller’s request. Legal Aid and the

⁴ <https://www.citybarjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Homeless-Need-Internet-Access-to-Find-a-Home-2020-Report.pdf>

⁵ <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-school-reopening-plans-must-provide-direct-support-to-100000-students-experiencing-homelessness-in-new-york-city/>

Coalition had even less information about how families and students living in shelters for survivors of domestic violence, youth, or single adults fared during the pandemic with regard to internet access.

On October 26, 2020, Mayor de Blasio announced during a press conference that “every shelter gets WiFi,” and that he instructed the City Law Department and the Department of Social Services “to send teams out to literally go shelter by shelter and simply ensure that, not just for that student but for the whole shelter, WiFi is in place.”⁶ The Legal Aid Society and Milbank followed-up with a subsequent letter to DOE and DHS requesting additional information, which was largely ignored. Without any detailed information about a specific plan – and with an alarming number of students who still could not reliably connect to the internet to complete their schoolwork – three families and the Coalition for the Homeless (acting as representatives for the class of impacted people) sued the City of New York, as well as leadership from DOE, DSS, DHS, HRA, and the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT) on November 24, 2020.⁷

The lawsuit alleged that the lack of reliable internet access for students living in shelters denied a core tenet of educational opportunity for these young people. Not only is every student in the city entitled to equal access to a free public education until the age of 21, but Federal law also guarantees “homeless youth and children of homeless individuals equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths” (42 U.S.C. § 11431). During this pandemic, a reliable internet connection is the most fundamental resource needed to access education. In fact, as school was conducted remotely, it was as essential as transportation, which is a subject of the hearing today.

After the Court ordered the parties to exchange discovery in anticipation of a limited evidentiary hearing on Plaintiffs’ preliminary injunction motion, the parties exchanged hundreds of documents and took depositions of various parties and experts, ultimately leading to a settlement agreement.⁸ As of April 1, 2021, the City has installed WiFi in approximately 75 percent of family shelters and, per the settlement, will complete all required installation no later than August 31, 2021. The City is obligated to ensure that, in the interim, all students with cellular-enabled iPads have reliable access to the internet, which may include replacing faulty equipment or installing interim measures. Shelter providers must post and provide information to residents and students about how to report technical issues as they arise and must support the families as they continue to navigate remote learning. Perhaps most importantly, WiFi will remain installed in the shelters beyond the terms of the settlement’s enforcement, enabling families to benefit from this essential service beyond the pandemic.

Shelter Eligibility

Families applying for shelter have long faced challenges proving their homelessness to DHS in order to be found eligible for shelter. The lengthy and bureaucratic application process requires families to provide a two-year housing history and document reasons they can no longer return to places they have lived in the past – a task that is much more difficult during a pandemic. Disturbingly, the shelter

⁶ <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-homeless-shelters-wifi-daily-news-reporting-student-remote-learning-20201026-qpuq3xcycjfo3eukwom7h3zqtq-story.html>

⁷ A copy of the *E.G. v. The City of New York, et al.* complaint can be found at <https://legalaidnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/E.G-v.-City-of-New-York.pdf>.

⁸ A summary of the *E.G. v. The City of New York, et al.* settlement terms can be found at <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/las-secures-working-wifi-for-homeless-students-at-200-city-shelters/>.

eligibility rate for homeless families with children has dropped substantially since the pandemic began. In February 2020, 41 percent of families with children who applied for DHS shelter were found eligible. In February 2021, just 24 percent of families with children who applied for shelter were found eligible, the lowest eligibility rate since Mayor de Blasio took office. Many families who are found ineligible for shelter are forced to reapply again and again in hopes of making their case satisfactorily to DHS. During the eligibility process, families are given conditional placements. School-age children in conditional placements face unique challenges to their education and often miss school because their shelter placement is unstable, although DHS has made some changes to these policies during the pandemic. During the arduous eligibility process, families often struggle to access benefits and supports – particularly transportation to school.

Int. 150-2018

Coalition for the Homeless and Legal Aid support the purpose of Int. 150 but join other advocates, specifically Advocates for Children, in suggesting substantial edits to further strengthen the bill. We believe creating a task force to better serve students living in temporary housing is an important measure to ensure these particularly vulnerable students are not further denied their right to physically access school. Prior to the codification of Mayor de Blasio’s move to guarantee busing for students in kindergarten through sixth grade more than five years ago, it was extremely difficult to support students moved into temporary housing whose Federally mandated right to remain in their prior school required bus transportation. Despite this improvement, many students still experience interruptions due to busing issues, and a large group of homeless students are still left out of these protections: students living in domestic violence shelters, students in conditional shelter placements, 3-K and pre-K students living in shelters, and students living in shelters who wish to participate in after-school or summer programs. Moreover, there are currently numerous vacancies in DOE’s Office of Students in Temporary Housing, thus reducing the number of staff available to assist with transportation issues. These positions must be filled so that they can work with the proposed task force to implement recommendations.

In addition to representing students living in shelters, The Legal Aid Society represents students who are currently residing in foster care through our Education Advocacy Project, which is housed within the Juvenile Rights Practice. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed. Among its provisions is the requirement that Local Education Agencies collaborate with child welfare agencies to create plans to ensure that children in foster care receive transportation to maintain school stability. Shortly thereafter, New York State Education Law §3244(4)(a) was enacted, requiring the school district where the child attends school to provide transportation between the foster care placement location and the school of attendance when needed by the youth in foster care to maintain school stability. Although for several years, the law has required the DOE to provide students in foster care with transportation to enable them to remain in their schools of origin, this group of students continues to deal with extensive transportation problems. We ask that the Committees on Education and General Welfare work with education advocates that serve this population and introduce legislation that would create a similar task force for students in foster care. The Legal Aid Society is willing to work with the Council on this legislation.

Int. 139-2018

Coalition for the Homeless and Legal Aid support Int. 139, as we do other reporting bills that will provide context and valuable insight into the link between housing and health care.

Conclusion

We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide written testimony, and we look forward to opportunities for further advocacy to address the needs of all homeless New Yorkers.

About The Legal Aid Society and Coalition for the Homeless

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society, the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal, and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform. This dedication to justice for all New Yorkers continues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State, and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 2,000 attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

The Society's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by the Society's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession. Our Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear before the New York City Family Court in abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Last year, our Juvenile Rights staff represented more than 33,000 children. At the same time, our Criminal Practice handled nearly 220,000 cases for clients accused of criminal conduct last year. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court are school-age teenagers and young adults. Annually, our Civil Practice works on more than 52,500 individual legal matters, including advocacy for families with school-age children.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits more than 1.7 million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to homeless New Yorkers. The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the *Callahan* and *Eldredge* cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the *McCain/Boston* litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to

homeless families. The Society, in collaboration with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLC, filed *C.W. v. The City of New York*, a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of runaway and homeless youth in New York City. The Society, along with institutional plaintiffs Coalition for the Homeless and Center for Independence of the Disabled – NY, settled *Butler v. City of New York* on behalf of all disabled New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. As detailed in this testimony, Legal Aid has continued to litigate on behalf of thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, including in *E.G.* where we ensured WiFi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters as well *Fisher* where we continue to litigate to protect the rights of individuals living in de-densification hotels during the pandemic.

Additionally, Legal Aid is well-suited to represent the needs of students. Our Criminal, Civil, and Juvenile practices engage in educational advocacy for our clients, in the areas of special education, school discipline, and school placement and programming. In addition to representing these children each year in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients.

Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fourth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: Permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition’s mobile soup kitchen, which usually distributes about 900 nutritious hot meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers on the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx, is now regularly serving more than 1,100 meals per night and distributing PPE and emergency supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. In response to the pandemic, we are operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: “The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The *Eldredge* case extended this legal requirement to homeless single

women. The *Callahan* consent decree and the *Eldredge* case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor other facilities serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by The Legal Aid Society and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws.

Testimony re: Youth in Shelter and the School System

Submitted to

New York City Committee on Education and General Welfare

Submitted by Tydie Abreu, Policy Analyst/Compliance Specialist at Hispanic Federation

April 16, 2021

Thank you, Councilmember and Committee Chair Treyger, and all other committee members, for taking the time to listen to the testimony drafted by Hispanic Federation; a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through programs and legislative advocacy.

Addressing the Needs for Youth in Shelter Across New York City

My name is Tydie Abreu and as the policy analyst for Hispanic Federation, I am here to advocate for youth in shelters across New York City, particularly those from communities of color struggling to face the challenges that COVID-19 has posed in their lives since the full shut-down of our schools in mid-March 2020. New York City has seen the highest numbers of homelessness since the Great Depression.¹ In January 2021 alone, there were 17,645 homeless children sleeping in shelters across the city.² Moreover, Black and brown students make up 94% of students living in shelters and are navigating a myriad of challenges beyond their unstable living situation due to disproportionate inequities affecting students of color in education systems. These challenges make it hard for students to engage in schoolwork, which leads to incomplete education goals (i.e., high school graduation). In fact, only 45% of homeless youth graduate high school in four years.

Research shows that housing affordability due to job loss, eviction, overcrowded housing situations, etc. is a primary reason many families end up at homeless shelters. This can lead to higher mental health trauma challenges that can have long-term effects in an individual's opportunities for a better life. As school districts and the city receive funding to support education, it is imperative that students living in homeless shelters are provided the necessary resources to achieve their educational and career goals. To address this, Hispanic Federation strongly urges the council members and city leadership to include and prioritize the following recommendations:

1. Ensure access and continuation of technology (high-quality internet, devices, and digital literacy trainings) support at homeless shelters.
2. Increase culturally-relevant and linguistically diverse mental health supports.
3. Train shelter staff and/or hire more education-focused professional to navigate education related issues and directly support the youth at homeless shelters.

¹ J. Crouse, *The Homeless Transient in the Great Depression: New York State, 1929 – 1941*, SUNY Press, 1986.

² Coalition for the Homeless Basic Facts: <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city-data-and-charts/>

4. Pursue holistic approaches to lead homeless youth to equitable postsecondary and career opportunities.
5. Engage in a city-wide initiative that addresses educational barriers for homeless youth (housing, food, and financial insecurities) in collaboration with the education department and community-based organizations who are experts in working with homeless youth.

Access to High-Quality Technology Supports for Homeless Youth

It has been almost a year since homeless youth, like many other students, had their academic learning interrupted, and initial data showed difficulties homeless shelters faced to provide reliable internet connection. As the state and city make a commitment to New Yorkers to improve access to high-quality internet connections, devices and digital literacy trainings, homeless shelters must be added as a priority space to provide connection. Currently, across the city, over 60% of the city's nearly one million public school families opted to finish out the school year learning remotely, which suggests that the majority of students continue to learn remotely. Additionally, although schools are working to return to full-time in-person learning in the summer and fall, the reality is that forms of remote learning will be part of education systems moving forward after the pandemic. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to prioritize access to high-quality broadband, technology devices and digital literacy supports for youth living in shelters.

The city has allocated a \$157 million plan to provide broadband access to New York City residents, nonetheless, the city has not been able to provide such services in a reasonable timeline.³ We urge the council to prioritize internet connection and technology support for shelters that can support the 111,000 children in homeless shelters.⁴ These supports must be implemented in a reasonable timeline that does not continue to leave students without the necessary resources to continue their learning.

Mental Health and Education Supports at Shelters

We commend the persistent work your committee and members of the council have done to support children and families address their mental health need. As the pandemic continues, the intensity of long-term trauma increases for many students, but specially for youth living in shelters. This is exacerbated by the uncertainty that families and students face to find stable housing. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, shelters were seeing higher numbers of New Yorkers in need of housing support due to the increasing unemployment rates.⁵ However, COVID-19 restrictions of social distancing and protocols made it difficult to provide more space for families and the lack of financial resources for the shelter led them to also dismissed working staff.⁶ At this point, it is critical for the city to invest in hiring more staff support and focus on trauma-informed mental health workers for shelters that continue to see higher numbers

³ Some homeless shelter operators in NYC bypass the city to speed up WiFi access. *The New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/25/world/some-homeless-shelter-operators-in-nyc-bypass-the-city-to-speed-up-wi-fi-access.html>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Pandemic causing New York's homeless population to grow: <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2020/09/25/growing-homeless-population-in-new-york->

⁶ New York City's homeless face additional challenges during COVID-19: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/new-york-citys-homeless-face-additional-challenges-during-covid-19-2020-04-13>

due to COVID-19. Additionally, given that many of the youth experiencing homelessness are people of color, mental health counselors must be trained in culturally relevant and linguistically diverse practices that meets the needs of this population.

Moreover, as remote learning continues, shelters would greatly benefit from having direct education experts who work directly with the department of education or run community-based programming focused on education resources at each of the city shelter's location. Having access to direct education services in a safe matter during these difficult times can make an impactful difference for homeless youth to gain more education support. Data has shown that proximity to schools has a positive impact on school attendance for homeless youth. Homeless youth who live near their schools are less likely to change schools and have higher retention rates.⁷ Therefore, having access to an education expert at a homeless shelter and being near their school can improve the odds for homeless youth to succeed. This can also make a difference in long-term goals for homeless youth to graduate on time and have access to postsecondary and career opportunities.

Postsecondary and Career Opportunities for Homeless Youth

Experiencing homelessness for many young students can be detrimental on their goals to pursue higher education or careers that achieve economic stability. Even before COVID, the academic outcomes of students who experienced homelessness were consistently lower than other populations.⁸ The city has taken a clear stand on supporting students on an equitably basis to return to schools. The mayor released a preliminary budget addressing the importance of supporting a re-opening plan and achievement gap. Nevertheless, direct supports that looks at postsecondary attainment data for homeless youth is critical to ensure equitable programming is created to support this vulnerable population. Having a better understanding of what homeless youth needs are during and after COVID-19 must be at the forefront to ensure an equitable reopening of schools. Furthermore, as the city invests in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), impartial access must be given to homeless youth to take advantage of this important resource.

Collaborative Efforts Across Sectors

The time to increase collaborations across city leaders, education experts, community organizations and the department of education is currently at its most critical. The commitment and perspective that each area provides offers insightful data and information to take action. For our homeless youth that is mostly composed of communities of color, building a city-wide initiative that takes a deep look at the systemic barriers hindering their future can be life changing. This is the time to re-engage with a population that requires critical support systems to move towards a fulfilling life. As we move forward, and the vaccine distribution provides safety relief for families, it is important to act and ensure that the wider gap created by the pandemic does not continue affecting historically underserved populations long-term.

⁷ July 2020. A closer look: Proximity boots homeless student performance in New York City. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/224000/1/dp13558.pdf>

⁸ Student homelessness in New York City. *Institute for Children Poverty and Homelessness*. <https://www.icphusa.org/student-homelessness-nyc/>

In summation, New York City must address the needs of homeless youth by providing access to broadband in a timely matter, provide culturally and linguistically diverse mental and education experts at homeless shelters, improve resources to guide students towards fulfilling postsecondary and career opportunities, and work collaboratively across sector to present a city-wide initiative that learns and provides an in-depth understanding of homeless youth needs. I thank you for your time and reemphasize how critical it is to prioritize these needs and welcome any opportunities for partnership.

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

New York City Council Committee on Education

Oversight - Youth in Shelter and the School System

Friday, April 16, 2021

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Chair Levin, and Chair Treyger for holding this critical joint Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Education oversight hearing on Youth in Shelter and the School System. We are all in agreement that the voices of students facing homelessness need to be heard, and that their needs are being addressed and prioritized during this pandemic.

My name is Leonard Leveille, and I am a Social Work Coordinator in the Helping Hands for Families (HHF) preventive services program at JCCA. JCCA's HHF stabilizes families at risk of foster care placement because a child or other family member faces challenges with mental health and/or substance abuse. In the current climate caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations such as JCCA have played a critical role addressing the needs of homeless students and will continue to provide them with important resources post-pandemic to help them succeed.

I have been working in child welfare for 13 years, with the last 5 years in preventive services. I have seen firsthand the impact of shelter placement of education for the children we serve. Housing is a major issue, as some clients we serve are already in shelter placements when referred, or families that are dealing with eviction end up going to PATH for shelter placement after eviction.

For families that are already in the shelter when referred to our program, they face the uncertainty of possibly being moved to another shelter without notice. When this occurs, the children's schooling is impacted as the family can be moved to anywhere within the five boroughs of New York. Imagine residing in a shelter in Brooklyn, and then being told that the family has to relocate to a shelter Bronx. The school age children are now impacted as they're now having a longer commute to school. Parents are now faced with the tough decision of whether to request busing for their child(ren) to continue attending school of origin, or to transfer their child(ren) to the new zoned school. The same situation goes for families who are evicted and placed in the shelter for placement.

Consider the emotional toll this has on children. Having to already move and adjust to a new neighborhood, new teacher, new students, and new friends. It is important to have busing in place for families that want to keep continuity for their children by attending school of origin. I have seen bus routes take time to become accessible to children and as a result these children miss out on school. Also, at times there are no bus routes available to a school of origin and families have no choice but to transfer schools. Some shelters have an educational coordinator who is able to expedite connecting the children to busing services when possible. Also, I have seen some shelters provide their own transportation for the children to travel to and from their school of origin.

Creating a taskforce regarding the transportation of homeless students would enable staff to gain expertise and understand the impact of homelessness on education for children in the shelter system. Also, the taskforce will help minimize interruptions in a child's educational life. I strongly support Intro 150, the proposed legislation sponsored by Council Levin that would require the creation of a taskforce regarding the transportation of homeless students and look forward to our continued partnership to achieve policy reforms that dismantle the systemic barriers that keep students – including those in the shelter system or facing housing insecurity – from full access to quality education.

City Council Written Testimony
April 15th , 2021
Janisha Crawley, School Counselor

New Dawn Charter High School
242 Hoyt Street
Brooklyn, NY 11207
347.505.9101 Ext. 9413
Jcrawley@ndchsbrooklyn.org

New Dawn Charter High School will provide over-aged and under-credited students 15 - 21 years of age, including those who are English Language Learners and those with special needs, the opportunity to return to school and obtain a high school diploma through a rigorous NYSED standards-based education program.

Here at New Dawn Charter High School we empower students to rise above barriers and develop into socially responsible young adults ready for post-secondary opportunities. We serve an urban population composed of students from underserved communities. Our mission is to support youth who face obstacles to successfully complete high school and bring forth experiences they need to successfully transition into a post-secondary academic or work preparatory program.

My role as a school counselor is to support students by giving careful attention to their concerns regarding their academic, emotional and/or social issues that may arise. In addition, I assist students with processing their problems and plan goals and action. A number of our students are navigating different challenges that oftentimes interferes with their learning experience, homelessness being one of them.

As the McKinney Vento liaison I am tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that our displaced youth are seen, serviced, and supported. Among our displaced youth are some of our most resilient learners and with the support of our McKinney Vento Committee we ensure that students have access to what's needed to achieve high levels of social, emotional, and academic success. We currently provide the following concrete strategies to support young people without a permanent living space.

Food: Displaced students often struggle to get enough to eat, we at New Dawn are aware that students learn when they are fed, and we are purposeful and systematic about making sure that no student goes hungry. Doing so we provide an essential component of intervention meant to help displaced youth succeed in school.

Safety: When we discover that a student either does not have a safe place to live or is in danger of being without a home, take time to understand each youth's individual situation. This is essential to helping students plan to stay safe. We are intentional about finding out where the youth are living and how long they think they can stay there. We listen without judgement and understand each youth's unique situation and assist where we can.

Transportation: We also stand in support of intro 0150-2018. When youth lack a permanent place to live, they usually lack responsible adults who can make sure that they are ready and out the door for school each day. Often time displaced students' official addresses may not reflect where they live, NDCHS helps by knowing where students live and assists them in developing a plan for how to get to school.

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Oversight – Youth in Shelter and the School System Before the New York City Council

Committee on Education and the Committee on General Welfare

April 16, 2021

Chairs Levin and Treyger, Council Members, and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committees on Education and General Welfare on youth in shelter and the school system. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am a Coordinating Attorney in the Public Benefits Unit and Shelter Advocacy Initiative at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). Founded in 1990, NYLAG is a leading civil legal services organization combatting economic, racial, and social injustice by advocating for people experiencing poverty or in crisis. Our services include free and comprehensive civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. NYLAG exists because wealth should not determine who has access to justice. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving individuals and families whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality. NYLAG goes to where the need is, providing services in more than 150 community sites (e.g. courts, hospitals, libraries) and on our Mobile Legal Help Center. During COVID-19, most of our services are virtual to keep our community safe. NYLAG's staff of 300 impacted the lives of nearly 90,000 people last year, including 12,200 older adults over the age of 65.

The Shelter Advocacy Initiative provides legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access the shelter system, and advocates for those

experiencing street homelessness. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process. Additionally, we assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the transfer process, seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs, and we offer representation at fair hearings. A substantial percentage of my practice is representing families with school-aged children who are in or trying to access the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system, and I am intimately familiar with the burdens they face.

NYLAG is grateful that the Committees on Education and General Welfare are examining the barriers that students living in the shelter system have in traveling to school, and fully support Int. No. 150 as a necessary first step. Challenges getting children to school are constant for my clients living in DHS shelters. These problems present most often when clients have recently applied for shelter and are engaged in the application process. During that time, families experiencing homelessness are generally given a temporary, 10-day stay at a location that serves as a temporary shelter assignment. At that time, parents have two options: either keep their children at their prior school or have them leave their current school, often mid-semester, and enroll them in the local school. It is rare to see a family intentionally placed near a school their child already attends. Rather, families are placed randomly and are expected to figure out a way to get their child to school. Arranging a school bus can take weeks, and until such time that a school bus is provided, my clients are expected to get their children to school on public transportation, which can take hours in each direction. As a result, children are often absent or late. And if they are absent or late too many times, the school will contact Administration for

Children's Services (“ACS”) and initiate a case of alleged educational neglect which can endanger custody.

Temporary placements are often assigned repeatedly as families experiencing homelessness are continually deemed “ineligible” for shelter. In non-COVID times, every time a family is deemed ineligible for shelter, they must return to the intake office in the Bronx and spend another day re-applying for shelter (which means they are not available to drop-off or pick up their children from school).¹ As part of the application for shelter, homeless families must provide a complete history of all the places they have lived during the last two years. This process then requires each place listed to be *verified* by outside contacts. If the verification contacts do not answer the phone, or DHS cannot speak with them, then the client is found ineligible for shelter for “not cooperating” with the investigation and they must reapply, returning to an intake center every ten days and spending ten to twenty hours waiting for a new temporary shelter placement. Prior to the pandemic, this happened daily to our clients who were required to apply again and again for months before DHS could verify their housing history. Additionally, successive temporary placements were not necessarily in the same location, resulting in further disruption to school placement and transportation, and forcing families to repeatedly navigate each disruption or risk a case of educational neglect.

Those families who are provided a new placement every ten days are the lucky ones. In non-COVID times, if DHS determines in their eligibility investigation that clients

¹During the COVID-19 pandemic, DHS has made many changes to the application process for families with minor children. Currently, when families are deemed ineligible, they are permitted to reapply over the phone while they remain in shelter. However, DHS has indicated that this policy will not be permanent, and it will revert after the pandemic.

have a purported “available housing option” from the locations listed in the housing history, *even if the family has proof that the purported option is not actually available to them*, DHS will deem the family ineligible, and the family will not be given another temporary placement for thirty days.² This means that when DHS believes clients have another place to sleep, even if the clients have been forbidden from returning to the suggested address or if that address poses health risks or is out of state, the clients are forced into street homelessness for thirty days because the purportedly available housing option is not in fact available. In these situations, parents may be forced to leave their children with friends and extended family members to avoid their children experiencing street homelessness. Under those circumstances, it is often logistically impossible for parents to get their children to school.

Because of the substantial challenges families in shelter face in getting their children to school, NYLAG enthusiastically supports Int. No. 150 and hopes that it may lead to effective solutions to ease the burden of children in shelter travelling to school.

We thank the Committee on Education and the Committee on General Welfare for the work you have done to assist vulnerable New Yorkers, and we hope we can be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group

² Currently, families are not ejected from shelter when their applications are denied on the ground that they have an alleged “available housing option.” Instead, families whose applications for shelter have been denied are currently allowed to re-apply for shelter over the telephone while remaining in successive 10-day temporary shelter placements.

2 Lafayette Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10007
T 212.577.7700 F 212.385.0331 www.safehorizon.org



Testimony of Olga Rodriguez-Vidal
Vice President, Domestic Violence Shelters
Safe Horizon

Committee on Education
Hon. Mark Treyger, Chair

Committee on General Welfare
Hon. Stephen T. Levin, Chair

Safe Horizon's Testimony on Youth in Shelter and the School System

4.16.2021

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Committees on Education and General Welfare. My name is Olga Rodriguez-Vidal, and I am Vice President for Domestic Violence Shelters at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. And we are increasingly using a lens of racial equity to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the positions we hold.

Safe Horizon operates six (6) emergency domestic violence shelters and one transitional, or Tier II, shelter across New York City, providing 673 beds total. We will soon be opening a second Tier II shelter with an additional 101 beds. Our confidential domestic violence shelters provide healing environments for families and individuals leaving a dangerous situation. We provide safety planning, counseling, housing assistance, case management, and other supportive services. We provide onsite mental health treatment at two (2) of our shelters, and we offer economic empowerment programming at all of our shelters.

We are grateful that the City Council scheduled this hearing today to uncover the many, many issues facing students in temporary housing, and we are hopeful that this hearing will lead to changes that meet the needs of the young people and families we serve. I'll be frank. Young people and the families in our DV shelters are struggling. Students have historically not received the supports they need and deserve from the City when in shelter, but the pandemic has exacerbated these longstanding issues. We notified our DV shelter staff about this hearing, and here is some of the feedback they provided to us to share with the Council.

Families in DV shelter need help with clothing and with school supplies (including technology). Families in DV shelter need more services for students with needs around additional assistance (i.e. tutoring, improvements to McKinney Vento, and IEP process). Families in DV shelter need a streamlined bussing process to ensure that children are able to get to school safely, on time, or at all. And families need access to more extracurricular activities and after-school programming.

Residents are struggling with remote learning and with striking a balance between work, their children's remote education, and the many appointments they need to attend (e.g. medical, legal, employment, etc.). One client, a nurse, struggles with having no childcare and with supporting her kids in a contained space. This client has 3 children, all with different needs, and she does not know how to keep them all focused on their respective coursework in her relatively small shelter living area. Her children are distracted by hearing what is happening in their siblings' classes. Before entering into shelter, her friend was able to come over to her apartment and watch her children while she went to work. Now, this is no longer an option. Our shelters have had to reduce our childcare programming due to the pandemic, and our staff in this shelter cannot always accommodate the 10 hours of childcare she needs each day. This client is doing her best, her children are doing their best, and our staff are doing their best, but it is a constant struggle.

We have also heard from clients about technological issues. Some families have faced issues with connecting for remote learning, as not all of our shelters have been equipped with Wi-Fi. We know this is an area the Administration is working on, but it has been a hurdle for many shelter residents for the entirety of this pandemic. Families have also voiced issues with the learning devices

provided to them by the DOE and needing to have these devices replaced more quickly. For one client, it took several weeks for the DOE to replace a device for her son after his broke. This was especially troublesome because her son is on the autism spectrum and requires additional educational supports. Naturally, the client was concerned for her son and his progress in class. In this case, our staff were able to provide her with an iPad while she waited for the replacement device from DOE, but we are worried about the kids who might be falling between the cracks.

We are concerned how schools are supporting students with non-English speaking parents and caregivers. And we are concerned about students who may not be tech-savvy or whose parents may have limited tech abilities.

Additionally, families are frustrated by the disruptions to in-person learning when a classroom or school must be shut down due to positive cases. The families in our shelters, including children, are dealing with so much disruption to their lives already. These additional changes from month-to-month, week-to-week, day-to-day are simply too much.

Our shelters consistently run into issues with having children evaluated for additional supports, services, and educational strategies, especially through CPSE which is a very confusing system. Additionally, children who are supposed to receive related services (PT, OT, ST, etc..) are not receiving them. There is a citywide lack of services for children who require additional supports, and families are left without adequate services. This is especially concerning and frustrating for the families in our DV shelters who are navigating so many systems as well as the traumas of violence, homelessness, and so much more.

As an organization that cares deeply for the care of children and caregivers and as an organization that strives to be trauma-informed and to provide healing for survivors of trauma, we would like to understand better how and whether teachers, counselors, and other school staff are trained and supported in being trauma-informed. Families, parents, and children are not always open about their trauma histories, and that is ok and understandable. We know, however, that creating a learning environment that is trauma-informed and caring is key. Therefore, it falls on the DOE to be proactive in ensuring trauma-informed schools and programming.

Safe Horizon is a proud member of the Family Homelessness Coalition, and we urge the Administration to accept the recommendations of our fellow coalition members to ensure equitable provision of supports to students in shelter as the City recovers from COVID. The City need to establish a plan to ensure that all supports offered to students through the more than \$6 billion the DOE will be receiving in COVID-19 relief funding are fully accessible to students in shelter. This will require outreach to families in shelter and equitable, low-barrier access to transportation, summer services, and tutoring. Additionally, the DOE should hire 150 shelter-based community coordinators to help connect students with school and other educational supports.

With respect to the two bills on today's agenda – Intro. 139-2018 and Intro. 150-2018 – we are generally in support of both.

We support Intro. 139-2018, which would require the Department of Education to report on student health services in correlation with student housing status for students in kindergarten through

eighth grade. By disaggregating data by student housing status, we will ideally be better equipped to identify unique or acute health challenges faced by students who reside in temporary housing.

We also support Intro. 150-2018, which would establish a task force on transportation for students experiencing homelessness. We appreciate the Administration's announcement five years ago that the City would guarantee bus service for all kindergarten through sixth grade students living in shelters and that the DOE codified this policy in Chancellor's Regulations. This landmark change has provided an important protection for thousands of students living in shelter, helping ensure that they have regular and consistent access to school. However, we continue to see challenges around school transportation for students living in shelters, including transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters, transportation during conditional shelter placements, transportation for 3-K and pre-K students living in shelter, and transportation for students living in shelter who wish to participate in after-school or summer programs. A task force can help address these issues, but we urge the Council to go further. We urge the Council to accept the recommendations of our fellow Family Homelessness Coalition members, including Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), who have submitted a mark-up of the bill with their suggested changes. These recommendations include expanding the Task Force to include at least two parents of students who are currently or were formerly living in shelter and specifying in the bill some of the topics that the task force should address.

The families coming into Safe Horizon's shelters have experienced pain, trauma, and violence at the hands of family members and loved ones. They are also living through the traumas of homelessness, racism, poverty, and now, our collective trauma of COVID-19. To ensure the health, safety, and well-being of families in shelter, including youth, the City must invest in both their short-term and long-term healing. That investment must include intentional and targeted plans to help students in shelter be able to participate and access any additional programming provided by the DOE, including tutoring, summer programming, mental health support, and services for students with disabilities. When we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of individual New Yorkers and children, we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of New York City as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.



Closing the STEAM Equity Divide

Closing the STEAM Equity Divide

Success should not be determined by the color of someone's skin, their zip code, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, or their family's wealth.

Success should be determined by equal access to well-rounded education, instruction that supports all learners, fair access to resources, and equal opportunities that enable each student to realize their full potential.

The events of the last few years have highlighted the enormous barriers to true equity and inclusion in the fundamental pathways to success. For decades, we've heard industry leaders from the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts/architecture, and math (STEAM) call for greater diversity within their professions and a greater pool of qualified candidates from local communities.

Yet, for far too many of our City's students, the obstacles to success are great.

Without diminishing the importance of overcoming systemic shortfalls in fair and safe housing, nutritious food supply, and affordable healthcare, this paper will focus on the strategies and resources needed to build a strong foundation for students' success in STEAM careers.

This can be accomplished if we work together to:

- Build on the strengths of the City's in-school and after-school programs
- Provide access to affordable, accessible, and impactful STEAM education
- Leverage the resources of the private, non-profit, and public sectors

However, we need to start where resources are needed most:

- Economically disadvantaged communities
- Under-resourced after-school programs
- And wherever students struggle to see themselves as successful



“Success should not be determined by the color of someone’s skin, their zip code, gender, sexual orientation, or their family’s wealth.”

Unfortunately, there are not enough STEAM experts to go around; students need:

- Access to curricula and instruction that are easy to understand and follow
- Engaging lessons that are designed for all learning styles
- Opportunities to debate, discuss, and design solutions to real world challenges

And for far too long, after-school programs that serve our city's under-resourced communities, have lacked high quality, low cost resources. After-school providers that serve our city's students in these communities are desperate for access to reliable, consistent, and proven experts in STEAM education.

To make matters worse, the negative financial impact of the COVID pandemic hit the DOE's budget hard for both the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years.¹ And we don't yet know the longer-term impact on student learning. While all schools suffered, those without access to supplemental resources, or the volunteers to secure those resources, will be hit exponentially harder. Similarly, NYCHA and many City-sponsored after-school programs within its Community Centers, already strapped for cash, scramble to survive through the pandemic.²

Solving these challenges may seem insurmountable, but together we *can* solve them.

This white paper proposes a three-part solution to serve after-school centers in under-resourced communities. Robust underwriting through a public, private, and non-profit partnership could support:

- Push-in programs provided by qualified STEAM non-profits for elementary students
- Stand-alone curricula that can be successfully implemented by an adult who is not a STEAM subject-matter expert for middle and high school students
- Mid-career STEAM industry mentors to nurture, encourage, and introduce students to college and career pathways in STEAM

¹ <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/7/22/21334981/education-budget-cuts-hiring-freeze>

² <https://cbcny.org/research/nychas-operating-outlook>



New York City has what it takes...

There is no better place than New York City to build the next generation of engineers, architects, designers, and other building industry professionals. The city is rich in resources, experiences, and opportunities. Our nation's financial capital, a world-renowned cultural hub, and a center for innovative technology, construction, engineering, design, and architecture, is a 21st century STEAM city.

So, it is no surprise that New York City continues to be a magnet that draws young, creative talent from all over the world. People come to New York to realize their potential, forge their futures, make their fortunes, and realize their ambitions.

But what about our children?

New York City students have just as much potential to succeed in STEAM fields as anyone else. In fact, with all New York City's resources ~ private, public, and non-profit ~ our students should have pathways to success that others can only dream of.

Our schools are filled with hardworking and dedicated teachers and administrators. Our Department of Education (DOE) produced the STEM Framework, an excellent guide to impactful STEM instruction.³ And our city has the Comprehensive Afterschool System (COMPASS)⁴ and Schools Out New York City (SONYC)⁵ programs that supplement in-school learning.

But despite our hardworking educators and the city's existing resources, too many students are missing out.

For example, because there isn't a teacher certification in STEAM, teachers must independently research and develop ways to integrate STEAM into their classrooms. More often than not, they must do this in their own time. Teachers with more free time and/or resources can create these additional enrichment lessons for students (we call them additional, but really, they are essential). Students whose teachers have less free time and resources lose out.



³ <https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/stem-framework/>

⁴ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/after-school/comprehensive-after-school-system-of-new-york-city-compass.page>

⁵ <https://growingupnyc.cityofnewyork.us/programs/sonyc/>

This disparity in access to quality STEAM education prevents a strong continuum of learning for all.

Tapping available resources to build success...

Positive systemic change requires a team of experts working together towards a common goal.

New educational initiatives must address grade-specific learning, deliver age-appropriate instruction, and create new approaches to engaging students. They must engage subject matter experts in STEAM education to provide push-in programs for younger elementary students who need a STEAM educator to guide their learning. They must provide intuitive and easy to follow independent learning opportunities for older middle and high school students. And they should partner with STEAM industry mentors to nurture, encourage, and introduce students to college and career pathways in STEAM.



“Positive systemic change requires a team of experts working together towards a common goal.”

Vital to any successful STEAM program is a deep understanding of the NYC DOE’s STEM Framework and clear alignment with educational standards such as the Common Core math standards, Next Generation science standards, and the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Visual Arts. Programs should build STEAM literacy, place theoretical concepts in familiar contexts, and give students the opportunity to practice new skills and apply new knowledge to real-world challenges.

STEAM programs are in high demand in any after-school environment.

But many City-run after-school programs struggle to retain qualified program staff, especially at entry level. Newly trained employees often move swiftly to higher paying jobs with new employers. While this is great for employees’ individual growth, after-school programs are left with inexperienced program staff and an expensive, ongoing training cycle, while students continue to suffer.

By contracting with qualified nonprofit STEAM organizations, City-sponsored after-school

programs have regular access to highly trained educators and state of the art curricula that reinforce in-school learning through fun, engaging activities. Effective STEAM educational non-profits constantly refine and update curricula. Their educators engage in year-round professional development on best practices, classroom management, and how to communicate STEAM concepts at various grades ~ they are subject matter experts in STEAM.

While issues of access and quality can cross socio-economic boundaries, under-resourced communities always experience the greatest disadvantage.

Families in wealthier neighborhoods may have access to private and corporate support. Parents might only work one job or have a partner who doesn't have to work at all. They can afford to contribute more to their student's school, the PTA, or help obtain coveted grants to fund programs that are beyond the school budget.

But why reinvent the wheel? New York City is rich with STEAM educational organizations dedicated to developing and delivering rigorous STEAM instruction.

There are many organizations like the Salvatori Center that provide rigorous grade-specific K-12 programs to support and supplement in-school education through engaging, rigorous, and impactful age-appropriate after-school programs. Programs that help reduce the STEAM gap for students who lack access to quality STEAM education.

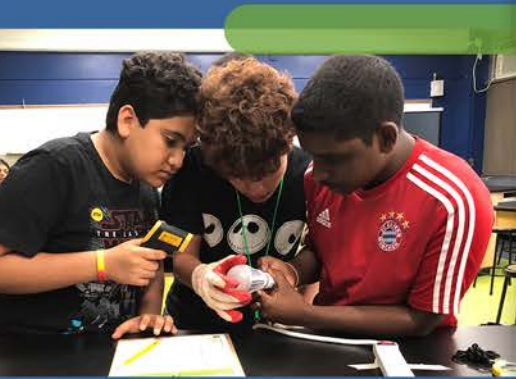
New York City has great after-school centers filled with students eager to learn. And our STEAM industries have young professionals burning to make a difference and open the world of STEAM to the next generation.

Together, through a true public/private partnership, we can help our most vulnerable communities overcome these disparities. We owe it to our children, and to the future of New York City's STEAM industries, to provide opportunities and programs that help local students see and believe that they too can excel in science, technology, engineering, arts/architecture, and math.

We have the experts, the talent, and the desire to help all our city's students succeed.



***“We have the experts,
the talent, and the desire
to help all our city’s
students succeed.”***



“Young children are quite capable of doing, at a developmentally informed level, all of the scientific practices that high schoolers can do: they can make observations and predictions, carry out simple experiments and investigations, collect data, and begin to make sense of what they found. Having a set of practices like these that become routinized and internalized is going to really help them learn about their world.”

“Research also shows that STEM support should start early: children in disadvantaged circumstances, especially, start school lacking the foundation for that success.”

The Core Principals of Success

We all know teaching STEAM ~ science, technology, engineering, arts/architecture, and math ~ at an early age is important. It captures students’ interest at an early age, builds confidence, and the self-perception that they can succeed.⁶ A 2016 study, for example, examined learning experiences in more than 7,750 children from kindergarten entry to the end of eighth grade, and found that early acquisition of knowledge about the world was correlated with later science success:

Children’s early knowledge about the natural and social sciences, self-regulatory behaviors, and reading and mathematics achievement may constitute modifiable factors that, if increased through school-based interventions, may help prevent or reduce the early onset of science achievement gaps.⁷

Salvadori believes teaching STEAM also builds the 21st Century skills that all employers seek:

- **Creativity**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Collaboration**
- **Communication**

Education professionals recognize the importance of building students’ self-confidence and self-perception that they can succeed in school ~ valuable insights and integral to any STEAM education.



⁶ https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/jgcc_stemstartsearly_final.pdf

⁷ Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., & Maczuga, S. (2016). Science achievement gaps begin very early, persist, and are largely explained by modifiable factors. *Educational Researcher*, 45(1), 18–35. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X16633182>



Impact In Action

On a recent STEM program classroom visit, a parent described how his daughter's behavior changed during a recent family trip out of the city. Usually she sat in the back seat, eyes glued to her iPad. But this time, she was absorbed by what they drove past and wouldn't stop talking about what she saw. She pointed out the trusses on bridges, different types of beams on buildings under construction, and even described how one stone arch reminded her of Roman arches.

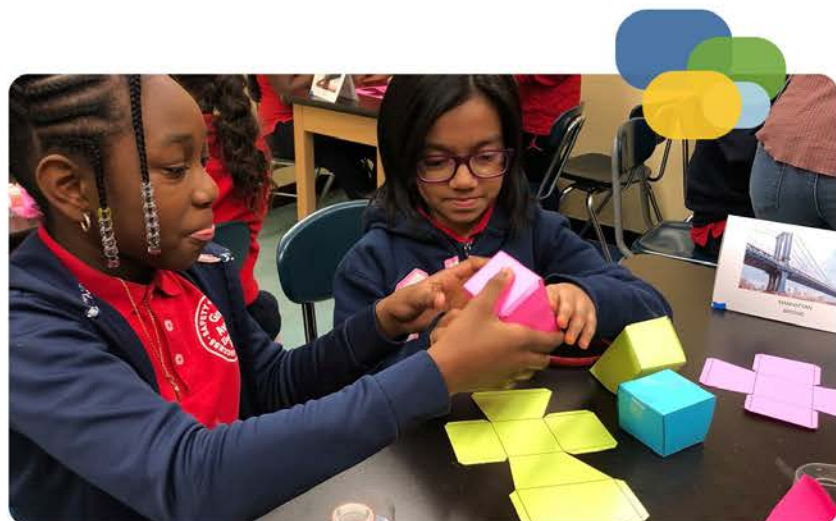
We can build these strengths for all students by making learning truly accessible. Yes, that means providing lessons that are fun, engaging, and tied to students' cultural traditions, daily experiences, their neighborhoods, and the city they live in. We need to link rigorous grade-specific learning to students' lives and to the world in which they live so they value the relevance of what they learn.

We need to make the theoretical concrete.

For example, Salvadori ties grade-specific STEAM concepts to the built environment ~ structures built by humans. Students see math in the buildings they enter, science in the bridges surrounding the city, technology in the simple machines in their playgrounds, engineering in the structures that break the skyline, and arts/architecture in the City's landmarks, monuments, and memorials. Other organizations use our waterways, the ecosystem, or outer space.

“We need to link rigorous grade-specific learning to students’ lives and to the world in which they live so they value the relevance of what they learn.”

When programs tie new concepts to what the students experience every day, where they live, their cultures, traditions, and the world around them, students see how learning is relevant.



Creativity

Creativity is fostered by self-expression and the ability to give voice to ideas, concepts, and thoughts. This requires courage. Courage to be vulnerable. Courage to express ourselves, to take risks, and yes, the courage to fail.

However, it can be harder for students to express thoughts if they don't see themselves in what they are learning. When learning is student centered, when they see themselves and their culture contextualized in educational settings, they make connections faster. They feel part of the system and abstract concepts become concrete.

Familiar contexts can encourage students to express themselves, explore new concepts, and share ideas. As students feel safe and understood, they gain confidence to succeed, despite the obstacles that may lie ahead.

The last year has reminded us of the importance of inclusion for all students.

Responsive STEAM curricula incorporate underrepresented STEAM leaders ~ architects, engineers, builders, etc. ~ and their work. We must help students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion, to see themselves reflected in the "STEAM heroes" they study so that they can see themselves in STEAM careers.

Inclusion provides a safe environment that opens the door to risk-taking, which fosters creativity.

"We must help students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion, to see themselves reflected in the "STEAM heroes" they study so that they can see themselves in STEAM careers."



Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a vital component of any STEAM program. It is integral to problem-solving and to the creative process.

The engineering, design, and scientific methods are similar. Each identifies a problem or challenge, analyzes a situation (posing questions as part of inquiry-based learning), proposes solutions, solicits feedback, develops/refines ideas, and improves the solution. All build on new knowledge gained through experimentation, trial and error, observation, and/or data. Each repeats the process until the desired effect is achieved.

Teaching STEAM effectively incorporates one or all three methods.

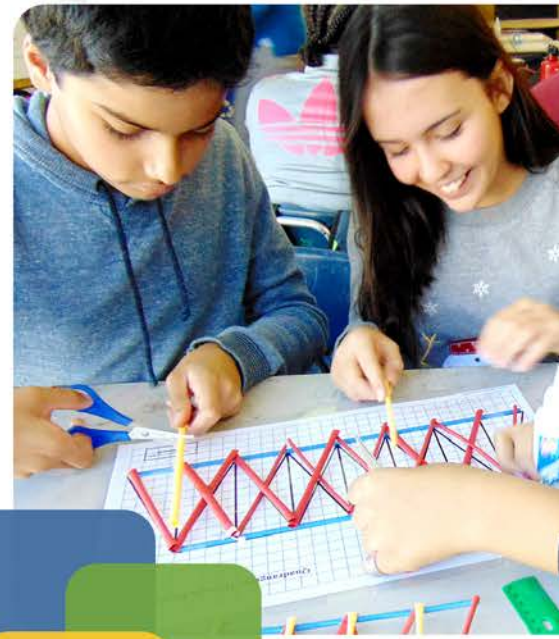
As students solve real-world challenges, they critically analyze a situation or problem. They form hypotheses and build experiments with their hands (project-based learning). And through trial and error they test and refine their hypotheses.

As you know, a hypothesis is merely an educated guess. As our knowledge grows our hypotheses become more accurate. Through trial and error ~ trying, failing, observing, analyzing, modifying the approach, and repeating until the desired result is achieved ~ students see the impact of critical thinking and learn the value of persistence and resiliency.

For many students, understanding “why they need to know this” increases engagement and improves knowledge retention.

For example, when a student is asked to form a hypothesis on which geometric shape will produce the strongest column in a building, they may wonder why it matters.

By learning that the shape of a column is based not only on its load bearing capacity (strength) but also on the amount of material used, which impacts cost and open space,



Our Impact in Action:

On a snowy icy day, I was entering a NYCHA Community Center to check-in on one of our programs. A maintenance worker asked, “What are you teaching these kids?” With some trepidation, I asked, “Why?” The maintenance worker replied in an annoyed tone, “A kid just told me to put rock slat on the handicapped ramp to increase the friction.” I couldn’t have been more proud. This is exactly what we want ~ students applying what they are learning in school to real world problems.

students 'get it.' Connecting school learning to the real world ~ such as columns in new construction around the city and in their schools ~ drives the concept home.

When concepts are made familiar, accessible, and relevant, students feel encouraged to ask questions and explore new concepts. Understanding why, and making connections to students' lives, makes the theoretical concrete. They understand why analysis and critical thinking are important and can begin to apply this to other areas of their life.

“making connections to students’ lives, makes the theoretical concrete.”

Collaboration

Collaboration fosters creativity through new ideas, perspectives, and points of view. And it is vital to any problem-solving process.

STEAM professionals must seek feedback and input from others. They gain perspectives beyond their personal world view. And they learn to work with and value the contributions of others ~ even people they may not know or like.

A collaborative approach to learning provides an environment where an individual student doesn't have to have all the right answers. They can share ideas, build on each other's insights, and work together to find the best solution. They can “think outside the box” more freely as they explore new ideas. As students are given opportunities to practice collaborating ~ valuing the insight and contribution of others ~ they quickly see how together we are stronger and better.

“As students are given opportunities to practice collaborating ~ valuing the insight and contribution of others ~ they quickly see how together we are stronger and better.”



More importantly, they are learning an essential skill needed to succeed in any career, and for every relationship.

Communication

Communication is key. It isn't enough to have good ideas or to understand a problem. Students need to learn how to communicate effectively.

We need our students to develop STEAM literacy.

The confidence to express themselves, the patience to hear others, the strength to question their position, and the courage to re-formulate their ideas. They need to learn how to seek the opinion of an opposing side, to embrace contrasting points of view, and to gain the insight to improve their solutions and projects.

Talking is the smallest part of learning how to communicate.

When students work in small groups of 3 to 4 students, they can more freely express themselves. They can critically analyze problems collaboratively as they talk it through. And they can use new vocabulary as they share creative approaches and debate ideas and concepts. They are freed from the pressure of presenting to a large group, the entire class, or failing to impress their teacher. As discussions pulse between small group interactions to whole class conversations, students are given opportunities to practice communicating effectively as they learn how to express new ideas, pose thoughtful challenges, and hone new vocabulary.

Students develop STEAM literacy, become effective communicators, and acquire the ability to remold and build on each other's ideas.

STEAM learning that uses the engineering and design processes don't typically culminate in traditional "show and tell" presentations. Students articulate how knowledge gained throughout the semester informed the solution to their real-world final project. They now understand how to apply knowledge to solve new challenges.





These skills are key elements of success!

Not just in STEAM, but in life. Every employer wants people who can work with others to critically analyze a situation, pose creative solutions, and communicate effectively.

Low Tech, High Impact

Tools that cost money ~ computers, internet access, equipment ~ can empower but they can also divide. We've learned the hard way that the technology gap unfairly favors students whose families can afford these tools as well as access to the internet, and who have an adult with time to help their child navigate new technology. Similarly, many cash strapped schools and after-school centers struggle to keep up with the latest technology.

A fair and equitable solution may take time to achieve, time we do not have.

Low tech project-based learning can quickly reduce this divide. Research shows that project-based learning can have a positive impact on learning outcomes for all students, irrespective of their background or socio-economic status:

Students in project-based classrooms passed their AP (Advanced Placement) tests, outperforming students in traditional classrooms by 8 percentage points. Students from low-income households saw similar gains compared to their wealthier peers, making a strong case that well-structured PBL can be a more equitable approach than teacher-centered ones. Importantly, the improvements in teaching efficacy were both significant and durable: When teachers in the study taught the same curriculum for a second year, PBL students outperformed students in traditional classrooms by 10 percentage points.⁸

Project-based learning is accessible, intellectually safe, and effective. Materials are often affordable or even free. More importantly, students learn by doing. They don't just listen to lectures or read texts. They experience all modes of learning ~ seeing, reading, hearing, and doing. Adding a collaborative approach to project-based learning engages classmates in discussion and discovery.

I had the chance to see students who have difficulty in regular academic courses excel through this hands-on, interactive experience.

-MS 72 (Bridges)

The hands on nature of the projects excites all learners and gives them a chance to problem solve unlike any other class projects.

- Salvadori Starter Teacher, PS 132 (My Community)

As I have consistently stated, one of the greatest benefits of the Salvadori program is the emphasis on "hands on" activities. During my observations I was able to notice students taking on different roles during the actual "construction" process and witnessed students successfully taking on some leadership roles.

- Salvadori Starter Principal, Northeast Intermediate (Bridges)

⁸ https://cesr.usc.edu/sites/default/files/Knowledge%20in%20Action%20Efficacy%20Study_18feb2021_final.pdf



Successful programs:

Design curricula so each lesson builds on content from the previous session, and engages students in activities that help them learn STEAM concepts by addressing real-world problems. Support increased student achievement by providing a coherent, in-depth learning experience that explores STEAM principles relevant to a particular theme.

Engage students as they build foundational knowledge, conduct controlled experiments, and complete projects that integrate engineering vocabulary, math skills, and design processes around a single topic, such as bridges or green design.

“Project-based learning is accessible, intellectually safe, and effective.”

Through collaboration, students learn that they don’t have to have all the right answers. Each contributes to success by seeing, thinking, and sharing ideas that the others might not have noticed. Through a collaborative process, students build communication skills as they discuss and debate ideas, explore results, and share observations on the process.

By working together, the group is more effective than the sum of its parts.

A project-based approach to experimentation, especially one with a variety of instructional methods (seeing, hearing, reading, and discussing), supports all learners. Before beginning, it is important to work with other educators to gather relevant information on individual student learning styles in order to heighten understanding, improve access to new knowledge, and form teams that naturally build on each other’s strengths.

Those who absorb information by hearing, gain through discussions and spoken instruction. Visual learners watch experiments unfold and appreciate image-based instructions. Those who learn by doing experience new knowledge through hands-on activities. And students who understand concepts through repetition gain while sharing ideas and presenting their projects.

Schools and after-school programs need hands-on, collaborative, project-based STEAM lessons more than ever, whether in-person, fully remote, or through blended learning. And while remote learning enables organizations to serve students in new ways, we must maintain a commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and providing a rigorous, transformative experience for all students, including those with special needs, such as English Language Learners, students living in transitional housing facilities (shelters), and students in hospital schools.

A collaborative, project-based approach can embrace learners of all abilities.

Call to action ~ Public Private Partnership

Laying the foundation for the next generation of STEAM professionals may seem like a herculean task but it is achievable. We can do it through a partnership between STEAM companies (architects, engineers, contractors, developers, etc.), STEAM educational organizations, and City government.

STEAM companies (engineering and architectural firms, contractors, developers, etc.) can support schools and under resourced communities by underwriting programs. They can open their doors and their project sites to the community ~ introducing students to the vast range of jobs needed to build our future. Companies' young STEAM professionals can serve as mentors, helping students see themselves in STEAM careers.



Educational non-profit organizations working in STEAM education, can work together to strengthen the pipeline of STEAM education. Starting with pre-school or Kindergarten and building a continuum of STEAM learning and success through college and beyond. STEAM educators can enhance school-based curricula, providing enriching after-school programs.

City government can provide financial, logistical, and physical support. City-operated spaces can house programs offered in collaboration with STEAM organizations. Agencies that serve our young people (NYC DOE, DYCD, DCLA, etc.) can provide access to students and teachers as well as partnership opportunities.

Independent programs, like those delivered by Salvadori and other industry non-profit organizations, are extremely valuable. But, despite quadrupling in size in ten years, Salvadori teaches only 8,500 of the NYC's 1.1 million students. Like so many organizations, we can do so much more but we need help, access, and partnerships.

A broader public/private partnership, supported by the City, corporations, and non-profits like Salvadori, can have a significant impact.

We support a public/private partnership to fund intensive after-school programs in select New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Community Centers across all five boroughs of New York City. Each NYCHA Community Center would receive:

- Push-in programs provided by qualified STEAM non-profit organizations for elementary school aged students ~ a reasonable start would be 100 after-school programs
- Standalone curricula that can be successfully implemented by an adult who is not a STEAM subject-matter expert for middle school students ~ starting with 1,000 classes
- Connections to young STEAM industry mentors to nurture, encourage, and introduce high school students to college and career pathways in STEAM

“A broad public/private partnership, supported by the City, corporations, and non-profits like Salvadori, can have a significant impact.”

Salvadori has a proven track record working with NYCHA on expansive programs serving students from all five boroughs.

Salvadori provided 50 STEAM programs across 25 sites (5 per borough) that reached thousands of students in public housing. Sites were selected based on need and in partnership with NYCHA leadership. To ensure a successful program, site staff were required to attend a full-day training program to establish buy-in and to develop an understanding of Salvadori’s approach, instructional merit, and partner responsibilities.

The program was a success. The funder noted the high intellectual merit and broad impact, and described the program as a “successful”, “interesting”, “unique” program that “invests in training the instructors to provide good quality delivery”. Unfortunately, sustaining long-term funding for broad City-wide initiatives is challenging for most funders even when successful.

Although the need was great and the program was effective, agencies serving students in our under-resourced communities can’t afford to self-fund the program.

But together we can improve students’ futures, and build a pathway for success!



Contributors to this white paper include:

Kenneth Jones, M.Arch. Executive Director

Executive Director

Kenn Jones started his career as a licensed architect working in New Jersey and New York City. His career as an educator paralleled his career in architecture where he taught undergraduate courses in studio art, design, and the history of art and design, as well as graduate courses in non-profit management. Kenn has substantial experience developing project-based curricula, interdisciplinary programs, and adult education/professional development. He has served as a U.S. Diplomat in the Middle East and as the Executive Director of Peters Valley Craft Education Center and the New York Foundation for Architecture; before joining Salvadori he was the Curator of Education for the New Jersey State Museum. Kenn holds a M.Arch. degree from the University of Maryland and post-graduate studies in historic preservation and design as a Rotary Foundation Fellow at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Using strategic planning and creative problem solving to achieve organizational goals and objectives, Kenn ties together his experiences in education, executive management, and philanthropy ~ an approach he brings to the Salvadori Center.

Email: jones@salvadori.org

David McGillan

Deputy Director

David joined the Salvadori Center as Operations Manager in 2010 and changed roles in 2012 to become Development Director. A British native, David settled in New York City and managed four senior centers from 2005 to 2010, after several years working for local government in England and a year spent traveling the world. David graduated with a Master's in Public Administration, in 2011, from Baruch College, where the United Way of New York City honored him with a Senior Fellowship. In 1997 David received a BA with honors in Creative Writing from the University of Derby in the United Kingdom. David is an active volunteer with Street Soccer USA – helping the homeless develop life skills through soccer.

Email: david@salvadori.org





Malika Khalsa

Education Director

Malika is a Virginia native who moved to New York to attend St. Johns University where she received a degree in Childhood Education. After teaching for a year, Malika became a Child Protective Specialist, investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and ensuring safety for children. Later, Malika went on to work with City Year New York as a Program Manager, Program Director and Senior Program Director, managing different levels of staff whose goal was to provide academic tutoring and mentorship to students in under-resourced schools. Malika leads Salvadori's team of seven Educators in New York City region and Northeast Pennsylvania to develop curricula and deliver programs to students through in-person, fully remote, and blended learning.

Email: malika@salvadori.org



Emiliano Maghallighen

Senior Educator

Emiliano Maghallighen was born and raised in Mexico City and moved to New York to study at City College. He received a BS in Architecture in 2004 and joined Gensler as a job captain where he helped design retail stores including Apple, Victoria's Secret and Gap. While teaching at the Guggenheim museum and interning at the Museum of Modern Art, Emiliano became interested in education and the arts. In 2009 he joined Organizacion Tepeyac, a non-profit organization that provides after school programs, adult education, and immigrant advocacy to Mexicans in New York.

Email: emiliano@salvadori.org



Roxanne Meija

Senior Educator

Roxanne was born in New York City and grew up in Queens, NY. As a child, she always had an interest in art and design. In 2006, she received her BFA in Architecture from Parsons The New School for Design, moving on to work in the design and construction industries. In July of 2010 she joined the Salvadori Center full-time to manage an after-school program in New York City Housing Authority community centers across the 5 boroughs. Currently, Roxanne serves as a Senior Educator and helps develop new curricula for Salvadori.

Email: roxanne@salvadori.org

Juliana Wong

Senior Educator

Juliana grew up in London, UK where she received her BA Honors in Interior Design at Kingston University. She moved to Hong Kong and designed for Ronald Lu & Partners on a wide range of commercial and residential projects before joining Goudie Associates as Senior Designer on the expansion offices for Credit Suisse. Settling in New York City, she worked for Lowery Design and then as an Educator for the Brooklyn Center of Urban Environment. Juliana concurrently trained with the DOE as a parent advocate for the School Base Support Team, and furthered her interest in how children learn through project-based learning whilst being an active parent volunteer at NEST+M, one of the first K-12 grade seamless public schools in NYC. She holds a Certificate in TEFL, Diplome de Langue Francais and in Danielson's Competencies. Juliana joined the Salvadori Center staff in 2009 where she has been writing and developing curricula, leading professional development, mentoring and teaching in Salvadori programs across all five boroughs as a Senior Educator.

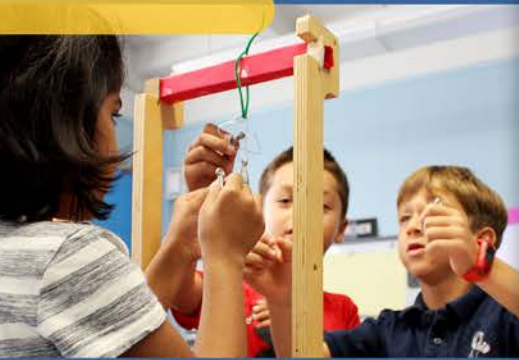
Email: juliana@salvadori.org

Additional contributions from Richa Sadana and Jessica Guice.





About the Salvadori Center



About the Salvardori Center

Salvardori's in-school, after-school, and summer multi-day programs celebrate a collaborative, hands-on, project-based approach to learning through the built environment ~ buildings, bridges, parks, and communities.

Students learn new things about the city they live in. They see the math and science in the buildings they enter, the bridges they cross, and the parks they play in. They quickly understand why math and science are relevant to their lives. The teachers we coach become our strongest advocates and schools return to work with us year after year. In fact, over 75% of schools returned each year.

Salvardori Educators work with schools to build durable skills, engage all students, provide results that reflect high levels of ownership, and directly support educational standards through the (4) C's:

- **Collaboration** ~ working together to hypothesize, build, test, and solve problems
- **Critical thinking** ~ analyzing how and why things work
- **Creativity** ~ posing creative solutions to real-world challenges
- **Communication** ~ listening, learning, and articulating complex ideas and concepts

Our programs help schools:

- Make math, science, and the arts intellectually accessible for all learners
- Increase student comprehension and success at grade-level math and science
- Lay the foundation for future STEAM degrees and/or careers

"Lessons and achievements were scaffolded to build understanding of architecture and design, even at a kindergarten level: impressive! The educator infused our themes of character and building in her lessons, giving students a feeling of belonging, evident by the personal influence/experiences seen in final product."

- *My Community, Flatlands*

"The Salvardori experience allowed my students to gain 21st century skills through collaborative and innovation. The hands-on activities kept them engaged and most importantly, they gained an understanding of how to be responsible, future citizens of the world."

- *Building Green, Belmont Preparatory High School*





“I think this is a great thing that Salvadori does. As a non-for-profit, city funded program, our funds are often limited in bringing quality educational programs, especially STEM related programs for minimal costs or free, and Salvadori does just that. We at South Beach were honored to be chosen for the program and the children are very impressed with themselves and their achievement of the “Big Bridge” as they call it, which has drawn quite a bit of attention as it is on display in our center lobby, and participants give the history of its making. This program gave participants not only engineering concepts, but built up their self-esteem and confidence to achieve. Thank you!”

**- Salvadori After School Teacher,
UAU South Beach**

Academic Rigor

All Salvadori curricula support grade-specific math, science, and arts concepts. Curricula are reviewed and updated to ensure STEAM concepts are current and applicable. And all our curricula align with:

- Common Core math Standards
- Next Generation Science Standards
- Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts

Throughout the year, our Educators engage in vibrant professional learning. They continually work to strengthen their teaching skills ~ pedagogy, communication, classroom management, etc. They participate in ‘Deep Dive’ exercises to develop their ability to teach with greater agility to different grade levels. This enables us to easily adapt STEAM concepts to real life situations; bringing STEAM life for students.

Additionally, we work with STEAM professionals to make sure that engineering and architecture concepts are aligned with industry standards. This diverse group of young professionals serve as mentors, sharing their journey, and helping students see themselves as successful in STEAM degrees and careers.

As a team, we have delivered programs in thousands of classrooms across the City ~ in schools, after-school centers, museums, and other cultural institutions. Working in such a broad cross-section of learning environments builds an unparalleled depth of knowledge and insight into what works and what doesn’t.

Salvadori’s Approach

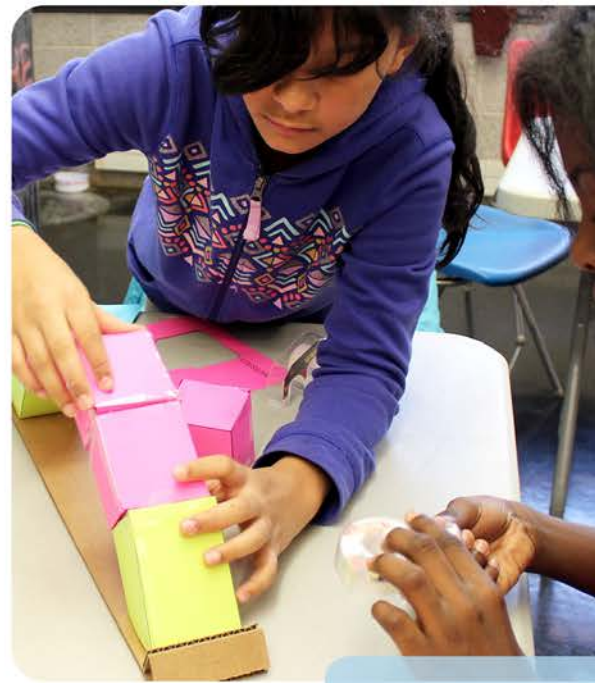
Our hands-on approach to building projects gives students an intimate and personal experience. Working collaboratively, students learn that they don’t need to have all the answers; each team member contributes to a more dynamic view. The small





group scientific approach allows students to form hypotheses, build and test apparatus, record observations, and draw conclusions. Results are shared, discussed and analyzed with the entire class.

Each multi-day residency or program includes multiple collaborative experiments that build toward a culminating activity. Individual sessions start with a re-cap activity that reinforces the previous week's session on a higher level. This reminds students where they left off and enables those who missed the previous session to catch up. The primary activity explores new concepts with hands-on, project-based experiments. Sessions end in a brief wrap-up activity, which is often a "cliff hanger" that motivates students to engage in future sessions. Students combine the design approach to problem solving with the scientific method of experimentation to explore new concepts and solve real world problems.



Salvadori programs help close the achievement gap for students living in poverty, such as those at NYCHA facilities. We give students what they need to succeed, promote college and career readiness, develop critical and creative thinking skills, and reflect high levels of thinking, participation, and ownership.

A Culture of Assessment

Our main goals are to increase comprehension of STEAM concepts ~ particularly math and science ~ to help students feel more confident in their abilities, and to encourage students to pursue



“We give students what they need to succeed, promote college and career readiness, develop critical and creative thinking skills, and reflect high levels of thinking, participation, and ownership.”

Impact in Action:

Salvadori Educator Kaelin described the powerful impact the program had on one struggling student:

I'll never forget the day I met Erica. Her teacher told me that she was on the autism spectrum and would not be able to participate. We thought about giving her independent work. I asked if she could try – I have a special education background – and knew she could participate in some way.

I don't expect high pre-assessment scores as students haven't learned physical science concepts yet. Erica scored 27%.

Although she had a hard time communicating, Erica had amazing fine motor skills. So I appointed her as our materials manager. She measured, marked, cut, and distributed materials to each group. Erica gained a sense of purpose and began smiling. Groups that struggled appreciated her help to complete projects on time.

Erica gave her all in every session. She made friends and found she was capable of learning in a general education setting.

In the post-assessment Erica scored 97%!

“Childrens’ perception of relevance increases throughout their participation in Salvadori.”

STEAM education and career choices.

Perhaps Salvadori's greatest accomplishments over the past few years are the results of our third-party assessment reports, conducted by Youth Studies, Inc., and New York University.

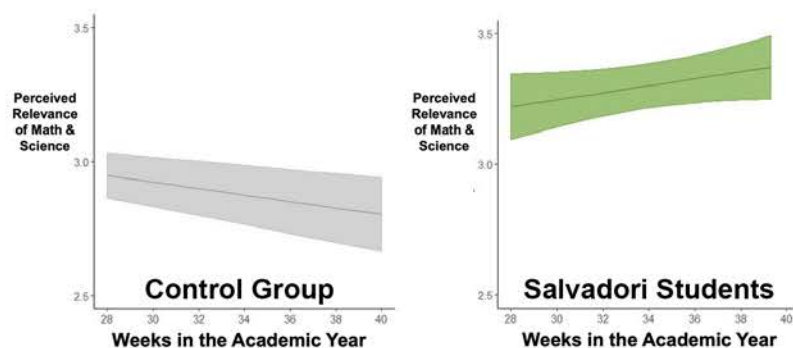
Results demonstrate statistically significant increases in student ability. For eight consecutive years of Youth Studies reports, Salvadori students:

- felt more confident in their math and science ability
- were more motivated to pursue educational/career choices in STEAM fields
- improved their knowledge of math, engineering, and architecture concepts
- increased their understanding of the scientific inquiry process



And there's more good news! A preliminary study by researchers from New York University's (NYU) Department of Psychology showed promising results of Salvadori's impact on students' perception that what they learn in school is relevant to their lives. The study began with these hypotheses:

- Salvadori programs help children see how math and science are relevant to their everyday lives
- Childrens' perception of relevance increases throughout their participation in Salvadori
- This perception persists after their participation in Salvadori



Graph shows what happens after participation (for the Salvadori students) hence the initial difference in starting points.



Salvadori measures effectiveness through a six-tiered evaluation system:

- Principal surveys assess ties to school-wide goals
- Anonymous teacher surveys assess curricula impact and ties to classroom objectives
- Independent assessment measure changes in students' STEM comprehension
- Intensive year-long training of new Educators, including mentoring by Senior Educators
- NYC Department of Education vendor performance review system
- On-site evaluations assess the quality of instruction

Preliminary results were extremely positive:

- In general, students who didn't receive Salvadori's program showed a steady decrease in their perception that math, science, and art are relevant to their lives
- Students who received a Salvadori program showed an increase in their perception that math, science, and art was relevant
- More impressively, students who received a Salvadori program maintained a sense that what they learned is relevant several months after the program ended

The beauty is that hands-on, collaborative, project-based learning not only has a significant impact on a child's perception that math and science are relevant to their lives, but the perception of relevance stays with the child well after the program is complete – unlike students who didn't receive Salvadori.

We plan to be able to generalize the results by replicating the study over the next four academic years. The new study will follow students in two schools and measure the impact of Salvadori's programs on students who receive our curricula compared with students who don't.

Thankfully, the expanded study will be fully funded by our Board so the cost is not included in this request.

Qualitative and anecdotal data collected from classroom teachers, Salvadori Educators, and students complement and reinforce independent assessment findings. All of our assessment results are available at: <http://salvadori.org/wordpress/programs/testimonials-results>

Serving through the Pandemic

As soon as New York City schools closed in mid-March, 2020, Salvadori Educators went into overdrive to produce versions of our curricula that could be taught remotely. This was no small feat,



considering our model has always relied on our built environment experts delivering the program directly, in the classroom, through collaborative project-based learning.

We wanted to respond and serve while staying true to our mission.

Within two weeks, we had updated and begun to distribute new versions of our hands-on lessons so that classroom teachers and new at-home educators, could continue to educate our children. From March to June, we distributed FREE project-based Salvadori lessons every week to schools in our network and worked with city officials and our funding partners to spread the word and to share these valuable resources as widely as possible. Among those who helped spread the word were our funding partners, New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer.

At the same time, our Educators began delivering lessons to our school partners via Google Meets for direct instruction, uploads via Google Classrooms to account for changing class schedules, and pre-recorded instructional videos for young students and supplemental resources.

Perhaps more importantly, in the last few months of the school year, we delivered free resources to “new home educators” across New York and beyond through:

- **FREE STEAM Lessons** each week for 15 weeks ~ to over 75,000 teachers and new at-home educators
- **Instructional videos** for NYC DOE’s *Lets Learn NYC!* on WNET THIRTEEN for 3 to 6-year-olds

By doing this, we helped teachers transition to remote/online learning, aided families by providing educational activities they can do at home with household materials, and reached new audiences across New York City and the tri-state region.



“This was a great experience for the kids this year. With the pandemic things have been rough. The program was done virtually and Salvadori Educator did an excellent job. She had a lot of patience with the students. Her instructions were clear and the students had no problem following them. She kept the students interested and engaged. The students looked forward to Fridays when we had the Bridges program and they were sad to see it end. It provided the students with some hands-on learning, a little diversion from our regular classwork, and a lot of encouragement and personal attention that the students need during this hard time.”

Moving forward:

As we slowly return to normal, Salvadori is already back in the classroom. We currently offer in-person, fully remote, and blended learning for in-school, after-school, and summer programs. We expanded our partnership with NYC DOE’s Lets Learn NYC! on WNET THIRTEEN to include a 20-episode series entitled My Community for 3 to 6-year-olds

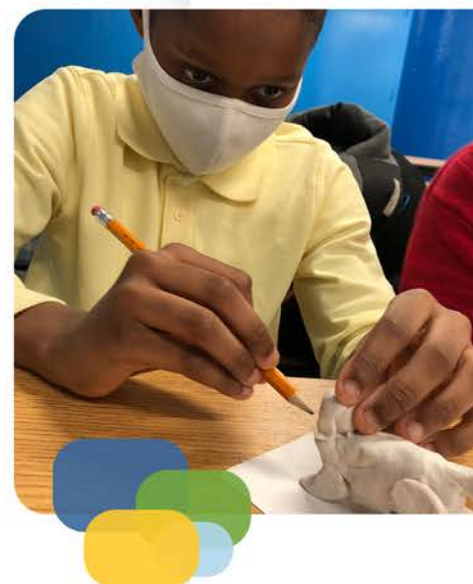
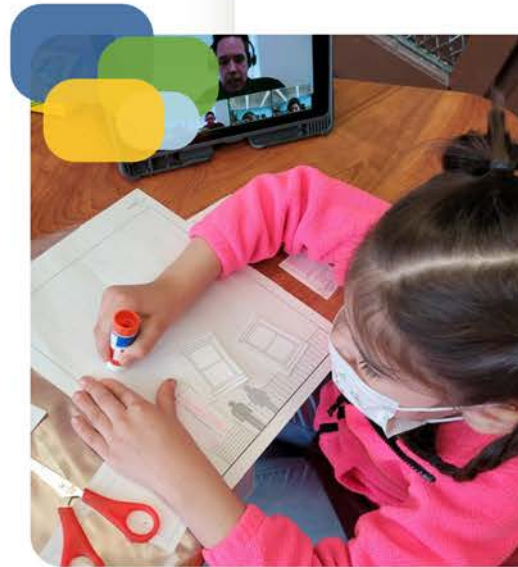
In summary, Salvadori programs:

- promote college and career readiness
- engage students through project-based exercises
- use the built environment as a vehicle for learning
- employ collaborative problem solving that involves all participants
- produce results that reflect high levels of creativity and ownership

The Team:

Salvadori’s team is as diverse as the schools we work in.

Our Educators reflect the students we serve. In fact, several were once NYC DOE students themselves and some have children currently in NYC public schools. When hiring Educators, we seek professionals who have a teaching background as well as previous professional





experience or education in related fields ~ NYC history, fine arts, design, and STEAM careers such as architecture, urban planning, engineering, construction.

Educators' backgrounds give them greater insight into our curricula and enables them to speak to our core concepts from a point of personal experience. More importantly, the diversity of our staff enables students to see themselves in their Educator ~ helping to plant the seed that they too can succeed in STEAM careers.

Our entire staff reflects the diversity that makes NYC great ~ a collection of unique voices and perspectives formed by race, gender, ethnicity, culture, age, sexual orientation, religion, and immigrant status. They know the challenges facing NYC students because they've lived it. They have been new immigrants, English Language Learners, BIPOC students, GLBTQ students, girls interested in STEAM, and so much more.

Their circumstances and experience gives them a first-hand understanding of the challenges facing NYC students today.

Full staff profiles can be found here: <https://salvadori.org/wordpress/about-us/staff/>





salvadori CENTER

See it. Build it. Know it.

See what is new at Salvadori by visiting our web site and following us on social media:

- [Salvadori Web Site](#) ~ assessment reports, resources for teachers, etc.
- [YouTube](#) ~ short videos of classroom projects
- [Facebook](#) ~ news and images of student experiences
- [LinkedIn](#) ~ professional relationships and networking



PO Box 1406
Wall Street Station
New York, NY 10268-1406
Tel. 212.349.6009 Fax 212.349.6810
www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org

**Testimony of Tammy Samms,
Program Director, Children and Family Services
Sanctuary for Families
before The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Education
April 16, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Tammy Samms, and I am Program Director of Children and Family Services at Sanctuary for Families, New York State's largest provider of comprehensive services exclusively for survivors of domestic violence and their children. We are so grateful to the City Council for the opportunity to testify today, and to Council Member Levin for bringing this urgent discussion of school-aged youth and the shelter system to the Council's attention.

For almost 30 years, Sanctuary has run a large, 58-family transitional shelter and four small crisis shelters that together provide residence for 350-400 adults and children annually—including over 200 children last year. Sanctuary's shelters provide a safe, nurturing clinical and educational support system for school-aged youth with wraparound services including individual and group counseling, after-school programs, one-on-one tutoring, a summer camp, and year-round youth and family recreational activities. You may be aware that domestic violence is the single largest driver of family homelessness in New York City: according to a 2019 NYC Comptroller's report, domestic violence accounts for over 40 percent of families entering the City's DHS shelters. As this hearing acknowledges, it is crucial to address the educational needs of children living in shelters—especially given the profound challenges these families have faced during the pandemic.

Throughout the COVID public health crisis, Sanctuary's five shelters have remained operational and at capacity, rigorously following health and safety guidelines, and we quickly adapted our services to continue supporting shelter resident families disproportionately affected by the pandemic. For school-aged children specifically, our shelter staff have provided virtual counseling; frequent wellness checks with every family; virtual group programming including literacy, arts, and physical movement activities; and



academic support including enrichment packets, school supplies, and an extensive tutoring program. All families have received access to emergency food, clothing, and other basic needs.

Sanctuary's response and service continuity in the last year has been critical. Even before COVID, school-aged children at our shelters—as well as at other shelters across the city—have faced an array of obstacles to healthy development and academic achievement, exacerbated by the pandemic. Transportation issues, language and communication barriers, a steep digital divide and difficulties with remote learning, frequent moves between schools, attending underfunded schools, placement in a shelter located in a different borough from their school, and chronic absences are just some of the issues we have seen. These challenges are all compounded by the ongoing trauma of poverty, housing insecurity, structural racism, and experiencing violence.

Transportation has always been an issue for school-aged youth in shelter, all of whom have the right to bussing. Because school staff are often unfamiliar with mandated HRA protocols for these students and due to confidentiality concerns for students in domestic violence shelters, the process of arranging bussing typically takes weeks. In the past, students were given MetroCards to limit absences during that interim period, however the process has become even more difficult during the pandemic. Families have not received MetroCards in months and DOE officials in charge of serving school-aged children in domestic violence shelters have been unresponsive.

These transportation issues are coupled with a stark digital divide that leaves many students in shelter without adequate devices or reliable internet to attend classes—all contributing to chronic absences for both in-person and remote learning. Recent DOE attendance data showed that in the month of January, 2021, students in shelter missed more school than any other group citywide. Youth in shelter who have experienced and/or witnessed abuse were always more susceptible to chronic absences as families



adjust to new shelter and school environments, and as they begin to heal and adapt after enduring months or years of abuse. Heightened patterns of absence have hindered students' capacity to stay connected with peers in an already isolating time and remain on track academically, particularly without robust support from DOE schools.

Additionally, language and communication barriers have intensified for students and families in shelter, heavily impacting immigrant families, those who are monolingual or with limited English proficiency, those without adequate digital devices, and students with IEPs. Amidst school closings and remote learning, often with schedules changing last minute, communication from the DOE has been almost entirely in English. As a result, families have missed important messages such as invitations to vital IEP meetings. In many cases, they are not able to get any information via phone, only via email despite often not having necessary technology or language capacity.

In light of these heightened, profound set of academic, social, and emotional challenges for school-aged youth in shelter—further amplified for youth who have been exposed to family violence—Sanctuary urges the Council to address: enhanced communication from DOE schools and administrators, including multilingual communication to families in at least several major languages, increased availability of school officials by phone, better oversight regarding responsiveness to families with academic, transportation, and technology requests, and improved academic support for families struggling with remote schooling and for children with IEPs.

We applaud Council Member Levin and the joint General Welfare and Education Committees' oversight efforts through the two pieces of legislation being discussed today. Youth in the shelter system and their families are some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and those most impacted by the intersecting public health crises of domestic violence and COVID-19. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued work on behalf of marginalized youth, abuse survivors, and New Yorkers in need.

Gateway Housing

Ted Houghton
Gateway Housing
New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare & Education
April 16, 2021

It has long been recognized and documented that children experiencing homelessness are much more likely to have poor school attendance than their housed peers. This is critical, as students must first get to school in order to learn, achieve grade advancement, hone their social skills, get adequate nutrition, and interact with service professionals who can provide them assistance and support with their challenges. This applies to remote learning during the pandemic as well – if children can't connect to online offerings, they can't learn.

With this in mind, in 2018 Gateway Housing launched *Attendance Matters*, a pilot initiative to improve the school attendance of children living in homeless shelters. We knew it wouldn't be easy: previous efforts had struggled to achieve measurable increases in attendance, and the reasons for homeless children's poor school attendance are varied: many children in shelter struggled with attendance before they became homeless, many sheltered children experience social and familial challenges that interfere with attendance, and many encounter logistical barriers to attendance, including transportation and administrative issues.

The Attendance Matters intervention was simple, and very much staged from the ground up, on site at shelters. Funded by the Robin Hood and JP Morgan Chase foundations, the program was a partnership with the Department of Homeless Services, Department of Education Office of Students in Temporary Housing and four leading family shelter providers, BronxWorks, HELP USA, CAMBA and Win.

It's not rocket science. We worked with DHS and DOE to improve access to up-to-date attendance data, we offered trainings on evidence-based practices and had Advocates For Children provide training on how to navigate the DOE system, and we hired an attendance coordinator to lead weekly meetings of DOE and shelter staff to review this data to identify students with poor attendance and develop service interventions to address familial and logistical challenges.

By making it clear to shelter staff that getting kids to school every day is a priority, by strengthening DOE staff's relationships with shelter staff, and by giving all of these staff members the tools they need, the Attendance Matters initiative achieved a measurable

improvement in homeless children's school attendance. Attendance Matters' achievement has been independently evaluated and confirmed by researchers at Princeton, University of Pennsylvania and Marist University in a report on the first year of the initiative that will be released in the coming weeks.

The Attendance Matters initiative taught us a lot about how to improve the school attendance of children living in homeless shelters:

- **DHS Client Care Coordinators are essential to addressing the underlying issues that interfere with homeless children's school attendance.** These social workers on shelter provider staff were introduced under the Thrive-NYC initiative. They have been a game changer in our ability to respond to the most complex needs of homeless families.
- **DOE Community Coordinators and DOE Family Assistants have really helped improve school attendance as well.** Having DOE staff on-site makes all the difference, particularly for families with students who have IEPs. I want to commend the efforts of Mike Hickey and the STH Office for expanding DOE's presence in DHS shelters.
- **Transportation is always going to be a challenge for homeless families.** It's an enormous logistical challenge. As an example, children in one shelter participating in Attendance Matters attended over 250 different schools. Establishing a task force to draw attention and resources to this part of the challenge would be helpful.
- **Community Schools are a good thing.** Attendance Matters experienced a noticeable difference when working with Community Schools. This initiative should be expanded.
- **Installing WiFi in family shelters is a fundamental necessity.** We were impressed by DOE's herculean effort to get tablets to homeless children. But we knew that cellphone data coverage in shelters is inconsistent at best. Early in the pandemic, Gateway worked to get WiFi installed in family shelters to help kids connect to school. Once installed, WiFi made a huge difference, not just in helping children learn remotely, but also lessening the stigma of homelessness by helping them stay connected to friends on social media.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for your efforts to improve education for students experiencing homelessness. A report on the implementation of Attendance Matters can be found here: <https://gatewayhousing.org/attendance-matters-report/>



ATTENDANCE MATTERS: A Model Program Pilot

A brief report on the implementation of Gateway Housing's Attendance Matters initiative, a quasi-experimental program pilot to improve the school attendance of homeless children, launched in a small number of nonprofit-operated family shelters in New York City in July 2018, and concluding when the Coronavirus pandemic closed schools in March 2020.

Gateway Housing
588 Broadway, #1208
New York, NY 10012
www.gatewayhousing.nyc
info@gatewayhousing.nyc

ATTENDANCE MATTERS: A Model Program Pilot

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GATEWAY HOUSING

Gateway Housing is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established in October 2015 to transform New York City's homeless shelter system into an effective, evidence-based intervention that assists homeless people to become more independent and integrated into their communities.

Led by a board of directors and staff members with extensive expertise serving homeless New Yorkers and financing affordable housing, Gateway Housing works closely with government and nonprofit service providers to rehabilitate aging shelter stock, helping nonprofit service providers and government to develop financing and legal structures, architectural designs, project scopes and resident relocation plans to create innovative transitional housing.

And because homeless New Yorkers often spend years in the shelter system, Gateway Housing evaluates the services and supports that most effectively help families and individuals become as independent and stable as they can be. To this end, Gateway Housing facilitates independent program development and evaluation to identify transitional service interventions that have measurable impacts on residents' long-term housing stability and other positive life outcomes. The Attendance Matters program pilot is the first of these efforts.

THE SAMUELS GROUP

The Samuels Group provides organizations with insights, research and direction to improve the successful achievement of their mission and goals. Led by Dr. Judith Samuels, its work includes organization-wide strategic measurement planning, and developing innovative data-informed, evidence-based and best practice solutions to address some of the most abiding and complex public challenges. From small local programs to global initiatives, the Samuels Group helps organizations maximize their impact, while providing right-sized, cutting-edge tools to keep them at the top of their field.

FUNDING FOR ATTENDANCE MATTERS

The development, implementation, management and continuing evaluation of the Attendance Matters program model were funded by the Robin Hood Foundation and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation. Additional support for Gateway Housing has been provided by the New York Community Trust, and the Richman, Oak, Deutsche Bank Americas, Revson, Capital One, M&T, Altman and Citi Foundations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For children experiencing homelessness, success in school offers one of the only pathways out of a lifetime of deep poverty. But the persistent housing and familial instability experienced by almost all homeless children results in high rates of school absenteeism. The subsequent disruption to the learning process reduces the likelihood homeless children will acquire the subject matter expertise, life skills and resiliency necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.

To address the issue, Gateway Housing contracted with Dr. Judith Samuels and the Samuels Group to work with nonprofit shelter providers, government and other stakeholders to develop and implement the Attendance Matters program model, a shelter-based intervention focused on improving the school attendance of homeless children living in nonprofit-operated “Tier II” shelters in New York City. Ongoing partnerships with the New York City Department of Homeless Services Family Services Division and the Department of Education’s Office of Community Schools/Students in Temporary Housing have been key to the success of this effort.

The two-year Attendance Matters program pilot was launched at three family shelters in July 2018, and expanded to a total of six shelters by the beginning of the 2019-20 school year. The pilot occurred against the backdrop of substantial, multi-year efforts by the administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio to increase clinical services at DHS shelters and reduce chronic absences through school-based initiatives at DOE.

An independent evaluation is being conducted to determine if the Attendance Matters initiative has succeeded in measurably improving homeless children’s school attendance and other positive life outcomes, but there are early indicators of success, and we’ve already learned much from the initiative’s implementation. During the initial year of implementation, intervention activities were regularly reviewed and modified in response to feedback from residents, staff and data reports. The resulting variation in the program model over the first year is expected to be reflected in the outcomes measured by the independent evaluation. Similar adjustments to the program model occurred when the initiative expanded to the additional second-year sites.

Originally scheduled to operate over two complete school years, the AM pilot was cut short three and a half months early in the second year by the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, which closed New York City public schools on March 16th, 2020. At that time, Gateway Housing and its pilot partners necessarily shifted focus to facilitating remote learning and increasing onsite educational opportunities at the shelters, efforts not subject to the independent evaluation and not covered in this report.

HOMELESSNESS AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN NEW YORK CITY: More than 10 percent of the 1.1 million students in New York City public schools are homeless or temporarily housed at one point over the course of a year. Just over one-third of these “Students in Temporary Housing” live in homeless shelters, while 58 percent live in doubled-up situations, and another 8 percent reside in other temporary housing.

Students in temporary housing have higher rates of absenteeism than their stably-housed peers. And homeless students living in shelter are absent almost twice as often as those living doubled-up, with the higher absenteeism of sheltered children often predating their entry into shelter. According to a 2016 analysis of DOE data by the New York City Independent Budget Office:

- Almost 27 percent of students in permanent housing missed 10% of school days or more (defined as chronic absenteeism);
- Over one-third of students living double up had chronic absenteeism
- Almost two-thirds of students experiencing homelessness and residing in shelter had chronic absenteeism.

THE ATTENDANCE MATTERS PROGRAM MODEL: Attendance Matters employs a pragmatic, problem-solving approach that addresses barriers to school attendance, and uses these efforts to identify deeper individual and familial challenges facing homeless children. In many cases, the AM program quickly identifies and addresses individual children’s logistical and administrative barriers to school attendance. In other instances, when more complex issues are identified, the AM team coordinates a clinical and social service response to address these challenges in the nonconfrontational context of getting children to school.

The Attendance Matters model is designed to rely predominantly on existing resources, adding only one staff person who works across multiple shelter sites, and has access to flexible funds for incidental spending. These minimal additional resources improve coordination between DOE and DHS-contracted shelter provider staff, allowing them to work together to address multiple personal, familial and intergenerational issues, as well as systemic and logistical barriers, in order to facilitate the school attendance of homeless children. Attendance Matters leverages recently-added staff at DOE and DHS, as well as the de Blasio administration’s redoubled focus on reducing the chronic absenteeism of vulnerable students.

AM PROGRAM MODEL COMPONENTS: Attendance Matters relies on three primary program components:

1. Coordination through a Multi-Agency Team Approach
2. Use of Data to Identify Students and Track Progress
3. Training in Evidence-Based Practices.

Attendance Matters improves coordination between DHS-contracted shelter provider staff and DOE staff by establishing interagency teams of multidisciplinary professionals at each shelter. These teams hold weekly meetings to review and track resident students’ school attendance data, presented in a user-friendly format.

With a diverse range of expertise, experience, skills and knowledge, AM team members collaboratively assess the situation of each child identified as having poor school attendance. The teams then assign tasks, track progress and employ a holistic approach to identify ground-level solutions across agencies and systems, to address familial challenges related to poor school attendance. Team members are given additional, advanced training as a group in evidence-based practices, such as motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care, as well as how to navigate the DOE system and processes.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Attendance Matters program was implemented during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, beginning with four shelters serving approximately 800 homeless children, operated by three nonprofit shelter providers: BronxWorks, Win, Inc and HELP USA. A second shelter operated by BronxWorks and a large shelter operated by CAMBA were added to the initiative before the beginning of the second school year. Government partners participating in the initiative included NYC DHS, DOE, HRA/DSS and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). Each of these stakeholders sit on an interagency workgroup monitoring the program’s implementation at meetings held throughout the year.

During the first year, the AM Leader was hired, teams were formed and trained at each shelter, staff roles were defined, information and celebratory events were held at the shelters, and the initiative experimented with different prioritization, engagement and service strategies.

In addition to expected start-up challenges, the initiative encountered issues that had impacts on program performance, including: shelter and DOE staffing vacancies; seasonal challenges; inconsistent access to healthcare services; and challenges related to working with large families in large shelters in neighborhoods with few community-based supports and services.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION: Independent researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, Marist College and Rutgers University are evaluating the short- and long-term outcomes of the Attendance Matters model and

two-year pilot. This independent evaluation will compare data about children and families at the pilot sites with children and families in similar shelters in the DHS system not participating in the AM initiative, to measure the Attendance Matters program's impact on school attendance and other outcomes. The independent evaluation will be able to consider and account for additional factors that may impact school attendance and other outcomes, including how the student population in shelters changes over time. Because the evaluation depends on data from DOE that is only now available, the Year 1 independent evaluation report will not be completed until Fall 2020. The evaluation of Year 2 of the pilot will follow when Year 2 data becomes available.

INITIAL INDICATORS: Preliminary program data from the Attendance Matters pilot indicates promising improvements to homeless children's school attendance. While not yet confirmed by the independent evaluation, these preliminary results offer interesting insights into the program's implementation:

- The percentage of children with good attendance improved at all four shelters in the pilot, when comparing May 2019 attendance data to the same month in the previous year;
- Chronic and/or severely chronic absenteeism declined at all four program sites;
- These apparent improvements occurred when the program model was still being adjusted in response to environmental factors, including staffing vacancies at some of the pilot sites;
- Shelters reporting weekly data showed consistently higher attendance in the pilot years over the previous year (without the program);
- Comparison shelters operated by participating providers without the AM program showed no year-to-year improvement in attendance.

INITIAL FINDINGS: The implementation experience suggested that three premises of the program model's design are valid:

1. That a shelter-based intervention designed to improve the school attendance of homeless children can be implemented.
2. That poor school attendance can be a useful indicator for identifying families with deeper physical health and behavioral health challenges.
3. That addressing school attendance issues appears to offer shelter staff a non-confrontational engagement strategy to facilitate their work with families facing more complex challenges..

The most common reasons for absenteeism encountered by the AM teams included:

- Behavioral and Physical Health Issues of Parents
- Poor Mental and Physical Health of Students
- DOE Enrollment and Administrative Challenges
- Challenges Facing Families with Infant Children
- Other Childcare Issues
- Initial Transition to Shelter and Children's Presence at Social Service Appointments
- Long-Distance and Local Transportation Challenges

EARLY OBSERVATIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS: The AM program experience suggests that components of the AM program have value:

- Holding weekly meetings between shelter and DOE staff to review attendance data helps to elevate attendance as an important goal, provides a forum for coordinating interagency efforts to get children to school, and can be integrated into the routines of family shelters.
- Reviewing attendance data allow shelters and schools to identify families likely to benefit from clinical support.
- Shelter staff are able to serve families by leveraging additional DOE information, like IEP records, teacher assessments and grade reports.
- Training staff together not only educates staff, but also helps to strengthen teams; logistical challenges can be overcome by offering trainings multiple times on-site at shelters.

- Access to flexible funding allows teams to respond rapidly to on-the-ground problems (like arranging backup transportation, doing laundry, or buying food), as well as to hold events to inform and celebrate the families and children in the program.

Staffing Recommendations: The pilot experience suggests that the following actions may benefit AM program operations:

1. Preserve and expand on-site clinical staff at shelters.
2. Investigate and improve shelter staff retention.
3. Hire more bilingual shelter and DOE staff.
4. Permit lower DHS Client Care Coordinator staff-to-client ratios to account for larger family sizes.
5. Make more DOE staff available to shelter residents during summer months
6. Post additional DOE STH staff at larger shelters.
7. Increase DOE staff at PATH.

Program Recommendations: In addition to addressing the staffing issues above, the AM experience identified additional policy changes that could help improve the school attendance of homeless children:

1. Continue efforts to ensure homeless families' connection to healthcare services.
2. Distribute 30-day MetroCards to all homeless families in shelter.
3. Create protocols for walking to nearby schools.
4. Make on-site childcare more flexible.

NEXT STEPS: With the AM initiative having recently concluded the second year of its two-year pilot, Gateway Housing is taking next steps to: complete the independent evaluation; disseminate findings; and modify the program model to facilitate continuation and replication of the program.

1. INTRODUCTION

Attendance Matters In Action

When the Attendance Matters (AM) Leader organized the first AM meeting at a Brooklyn Department of Homeless Services (DHS) family shelter in September 2018, he brought together the nonprofit shelter provider's staff with New York City Department of Education (DOE) workers charged with assisting homeless students. From different nonprofit and governmental agencies, many of these employees were in positions newly-created by the de Blasio administration, and had never met before, despite their common interest in the wellbeing of homeless children.

The Attendance Matters Leader (an employee of the nonprofit Gateway Housing, independent of DOE, DHS or the shelter provider) guided the new AM team in reviewing available, attendance data, made possible through a recent Memorandum of Understanding between DOE and DHS. The data helped the team immediately identify the twenty families at the shelter with the lowest school attendance over the previous four weeks, including Terry and her son, Sean, as well as Patricia, her two children, Emma and Harry, and granddaughter Carly.^a

The shelter and DOE staff compared notes and quickly set about enrolling and successfully securing transportation for Sean, so that he could attend a nearby middle school. But Patricia's family's challenges were not so easily addressed. The children rarely attended school, even before they had become homeless two years before: Emma's persistent absenteeism had left her behind so many times that, at age 16, she was still in middle school; Carly, Emma's six year-old daughter, was not enrolled in any school whatsoever; and 11-year-old Harry was doing only slightly better, attending class less than half the time.

The Attendance Matters case review helped workers in the new team better appreciate the complexity of the family's needs. Because the children each had a different last name, DOE staff had not understood they were members of the same family unit. And shelter staff had not realized the full extent of the recently arrived family's challenges, until they saw the data on their poor school attendance.

Comparing case notes, the team discovered that Patricia had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, traumatized by physical abuse from Emma's father. Emma also had suffered abuse at the hands of both her father (presently incarcerated for statutory rape) and Harry's father, who had impregnated her at age ten, leading to the birth of Carly.

Members of the AM team used the conversation of school attendance as an entry point to established trusting relationships with the family, helping Emma to see how returning to school herself would set a positive example for her daughter. They enrolled Carly in school, and transferred Emma to an alternative program for over-age and under-accredited teen mothers. They arranged wake-up calls and transportation, and connected both Patricia and Emma to psychiatric support, therapy sessions and medical care.

^a Case history names have been changed.

The AM team's work led to significant, measurable improvements in school attendance for both families. But it did much more: it helped Patricia and her children better function as a family, and, by the end of the 2018-19 school year, the DOE STH workers and shelter provider staff had assisted the family – who had lived in shelter for an extended period of time – to secure permanent affordable housing.

The experiences of these two families demonstrate both the extreme and relatively straightforward challenges homeless families face, and how they can benefit from a pragmatic intervention like Attendance Matters. Most promising, the AM intervention addressed more than just the children's school attendance, and put the multidisciplinary team in good position to tackle much more complex challenges faced by the families.

This report recounts the implementation of the Attendance Matters pilot, including:

- background information on the challenges homeless children face attending school;
- a description of the Attendance Matters program, its implementation and forthcoming independent evaluation;
- a discussion of what we have learned through implementation so far, including the primary reasons for high absenteeism of the families served by the AM initiative;
- some initial observations and recommendations for systemic changes; and
- a look at next steps for the program, including replication efforts.

2. BACKGROUND

Education is the Gateway to Future Success

Satisfactory academic achievement and high school graduation are normative goals in the United States. Attendance in primary and secondary school (kindergarten to 12th grade, or K-12) is related to the development of knowledge and skills, as well as prosocial relationships, resiliency and other competencies, that are necessary for future success.^{1 2}

If a child does not attend school on a regular basis, however, these basic achievements will remain unattainable, and his or her opportunities for success will be severely limited.³

This report uses widely accepted measures of attendance:

- attending over 90% of school days in a year is considered “good attendance;”
- missing 10% to 20% of school days is considered “chronic absenteeism;”
- missing over 20% of school days is “severely chronic absenteeism.”

The release by the US Department of Education (USDOE) of the 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)⁴ provides a view of absenteeism in nearly every U.S. public school.⁵ The USDOE’s Report, as well as a report by nonprofit Attendance Works and the Johns Hopkins School of Education’s Everyone Graduates Center,⁶ highlight important evidence-based facts related to poor school attendance. The most striking include:

- Over seven million U. S. students (one in seven) miss nearly a month of school each year;
- Students who miss ten percent (about eighteen days) or more of the school year have poorer academic performance;
- When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating from high school.
- A child’s absenteeism in the first month of school predicts poor attendance throughout the school year;
- By sixth grade, chronic absenteeism is a leading indicator that a student will drop out before completing high school;
- Students who live in communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent, frequently for reasons beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation and inadequate healthcare.

As the USDOE report notes: “Frequent absences from school can shape adulthood. High school dropout, which chronically absent students are more likely to experience, has been linked to poor outcomes later in life, from poverty and diminished health to involvement in the criminal justice system.”⁷

The Attendance Works/Johns Hopkins report notes that chronic absenteeism is often a multi-generational behavior.⁸ Motivating parents or guardians to help their children go to school (regardless of their own past educational achievement or experience) is critical to improving attendance and educational attainment.

Homelessness and School Attendance

For children experiencing homelessness, success in school offers one of the only pathways out of a lifetime of deep poverty. But the persistent housing and familial instability experienced by most homeless children results in high rates of school absenteeism in this population. Homelessness creates a chaotic home learning environment, makes it difficult to commute to school, and is detrimental to a child’s emotional and psychological well-being. The subsequent disruption to the learning process reduces the likelihood homeless children will acquire the subject matter expertise, life skills and resiliency necessary for successful transitions to adulthood.^{9, 10 11}

Moreover, the stress of homelessness can hinder children's school attendance. Adverse Childhood Events (ACE) can have lasting, deleterious effects on an individual's academic achievement and likelihood of graduation.¹² Despite mitigation from known protective factors (such as social support and training for parents),¹³ homelessness can exacerbate the known negative relationship between parental ACE scores and child success.¹⁴

Homelessness and School Attendance in New York City

On a single night in 2019, the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system provided temporary housing to 21,700 children in more than 12,200 families.¹⁵ Approximately 15,000 of these children are school-aged.¹⁶ While these numbers represent a 56 percent increase in family homelessness since 2009,¹⁷ they have held relatively steady in 2018 and 2019, and more recently have declined.

Approximately two-thirds of the families residing in the DHS shelter system live in "Tier II" shelters operated by nonprofit service providers, while the balance reside in commercial hotels and "emergency cluster-site apartments" in privately-owned rental housing.¹⁸ Homeless families residing in Tier II shelters have more access to services than those living in other types of DHS shelter, but experience similar challenges attending school. The de Blasio administration's March 2017 *Turning the Tide* plan initiated a five-year effort to end the use of hotels and cluster sites, and create new nonprofit-operated shelters, to eventually allow the family shelter system to rely exclusively on Tier II shelters.

For students living in DHS shelters, race is a defining factor. Two studies of 2013 and 2016 DOE data (by the New York City Independent Budget Office and the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness) describe an unchanging picture: nearly all homeless students residing in shelters are either African-American (53%) or Latino (42%).^{19 20}

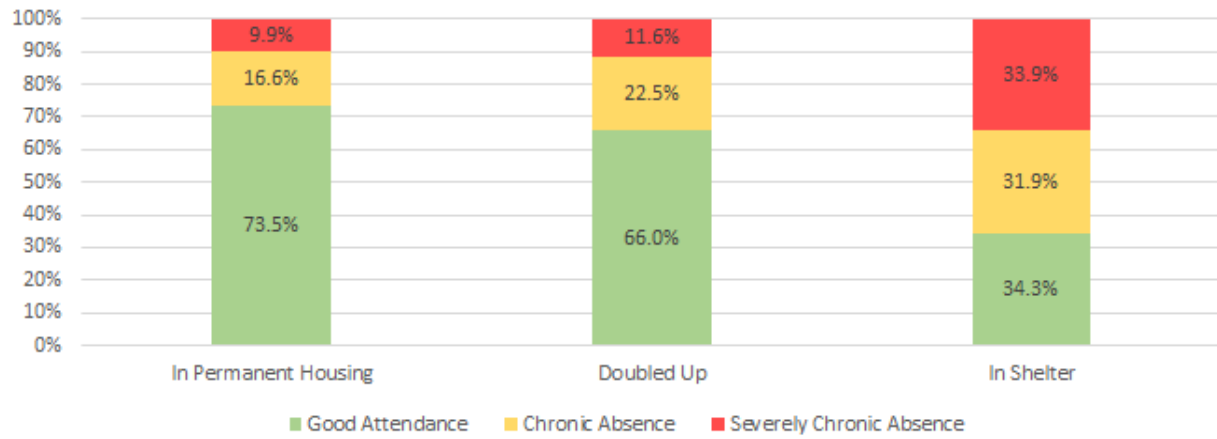
The U. S. Department of Education (DOE) uses a broader definition of homelessness, "Students in Temporary Housing" (commonly abbreviated as STH), that seeks to capture all unstably-housed students, not just those residing in homeless shelters. Like the shelter population, the STH population has grown steadily over time, increasing by 70 percent since 2009.²¹ Today, over 10 percent of the 1.1 million public school students in New York City are homeless or temporarily housed at one point in the year.²² The number of students in temporary housing among all New York City public school children was approximately 105,000 students over the course of the 2017-18 school year²³, with about 15,000 students residing in homeless shelters on any given night.

The statistics, while alarming, actually underrepresent the extended housing instability these children endure, as many experience homelessness during multiple school years. Two-thirds of the students who reported living in New York City homeless shelters during the 2013-14 school year had lived in a shelter in one or more of the previous three school years.²⁴

Students in temporary housing have higher rates of school absenteeism than their stably-housed peers. And students living in shelter are absent almost twice as often as those living doubled-up. According to the 2016 analysis of DOE data by the New York City Independent Budget Office:

- 26.5 percent of students in permanent housing had chronic or severely chronic absence;
- 34.1 percent of students living double up had chronic or severely chronic absence; and
- 65.8 percent of students living in shelter had chronic or severely chronic absence.²⁵

School attendance of housed and homeless children



Source: NYC Independent Budget Office, *Not Reaching the Door: Homeless Students Face Many Hurdles on the Way to School*, 2016.

Chart 1

3. THE ATTENDANCE MATTERS PROGRAM – HELPING HOMELESS CHILDREN GET TO SCHOOL, AND MORE

Mirroring similar efforts taking place in New York City Community Schools, the Attendance Matters^b program model is an intervention that is shelter-based, focused on improving the school attendance of homeless children living in nonprofit-operated “Tier II” shelters in New York City. It employs a pragmatic, problem-solving approach that first seeks to address barriers to school attendance, then uses these efforts as an opportunity to identify and address deeper family and individual challenges facing homeless children.

In many cases, Attendance Matters quickly recognizes and remedies individual children’s logistical and administrative barriers to school attendance. When more complex issues are identified, the AM intervention coordinates a clinical and social service response to address these challenges in the nonconfrontational context of getting the children to school.

The Attendance Matters model is designed to rely predominantly on existing resources, adding only one staff person who works across multiple sites, and has access to flexible funds for incidental spending. These minimal additional resources improve coordination between DOE and DHS-contracted staff, to identify and address multiple personal, familial and intergenerational issues, as well as systemic and logistical barriers, in order to increase the school attendance of homeless children.

To develop the Attendance Matters program model and pilot, Gateway Housing engaged Judith Samuels, PhD, an expert in family homelessness, and her organization, The Samuels Group. Dr. Samuels developed the Attendance Matters model with the input and assistance of service providers and other governmental and nonprofit organizations that work with homeless and impoverished children and families, including policymakers and program experts at the New York City Human Resource Administration (HRA), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Department of Education (DOE), the nonprofit Advocates For Children of New York, CUCS and four New York City nonprofit shelter provider organizations: BronxWorks, Win, Inc., HELP USA and CAMBA.

The development and continuing evaluation of the Attendance Matters program model are funded by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation. Implementation and management of the pilot program are funded by The Robin Hood Foundation.^c The pilot program was designed to operate for two school years, from August 2018 to July 2020, though most activities were cut short in March 2020, when the Coronavirus pandemic closed schools.

While the Attendance Matters model is designed primarily to improve school attendance, additional potential outcomes include improved school performance, shorter shelter stays, and increased stability upon shelter exit. The Attendance Matters program pilot began in three shelters serving homeless families with children in New York City, each operated by a different nonprofit shelter provider organization. By the end of Year 1, Gateway Housing learned that the three original shelters share supervision and many resources with other shelters in their organizations. This led to AM program components and practices being informally adopted at other shelter sites. To counter this “intervention leakage,” the pilot was officially expanded to two additional shelters during the first year, in the Fall of 2018 and the Spring 2019. A sixth shelter joined at the beginning of the second school year.

Of the six shelters participating in the program pilot, four are similar in size — medium capacity facilities sheltering 50 to 100 families at any given time. The remaining shelter participating in Year 1 is notably larger, with a capacity

^b The program was originally called Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children (ISAHC). During the summer of 2019, the program was renamed, “Attendance Matters.”

^c Additional support for Gateway Housing has been provided by the New York Community Trust, the Richman Foundation, the Oak Foundation, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, the Revson Foundation, the Capital One Foundation and the M & T Foundation.

of over 200 families. This site also shelters predominantly larger-sized families. After the first school year, Gateway Housing added one other large facility, for a total of six AM program shelters in the second year of the pilot.

THE ATTENDANCE MATTERS PROGRAM MODEL AND ITS COMPONENTS

The Attendance Matters model relies on three primary program components:

1. Coordination through a Multi-Agency Team Approach
2. Use of Data to Identify Students and Track Progress
3. Training in Evidence-Based Practices.

1. Coordination through a Multi-Agency Team Approach - The most important element of the Attendance Matters program model is the focus on improving coordination between DHS-contracted shelter staff and DOE staff (both school-based and from central and regional DOE offices). Coordination is improved by establishing interagency teams at each shelter, holding weekly meetings, having a team leader to track case progress, assign tasks to and regularly communicate with individual team members, and holding regular interagency workgroup meetings to monitor outcomes and troubleshoot systemic issues.

The Attendance Matters teams at each shelter include a constellation of professionals from different agencies and organizations. Each of them have different roles, but are all in some way responsible for assisting homeless families to ensure their children attend school. With a diverse range of expertise, experience, skills and knowledge, Attendance Matters team members collaboratively assess the situation of each child identified as having poor school attendance. They then employ a holistic approach to identify ground-level solutions across agencies and systems to address familial challenges related to poor school attendance.

Attendance Matters Team Members

Members of the Attendance Matters teams include, but are not limited to:

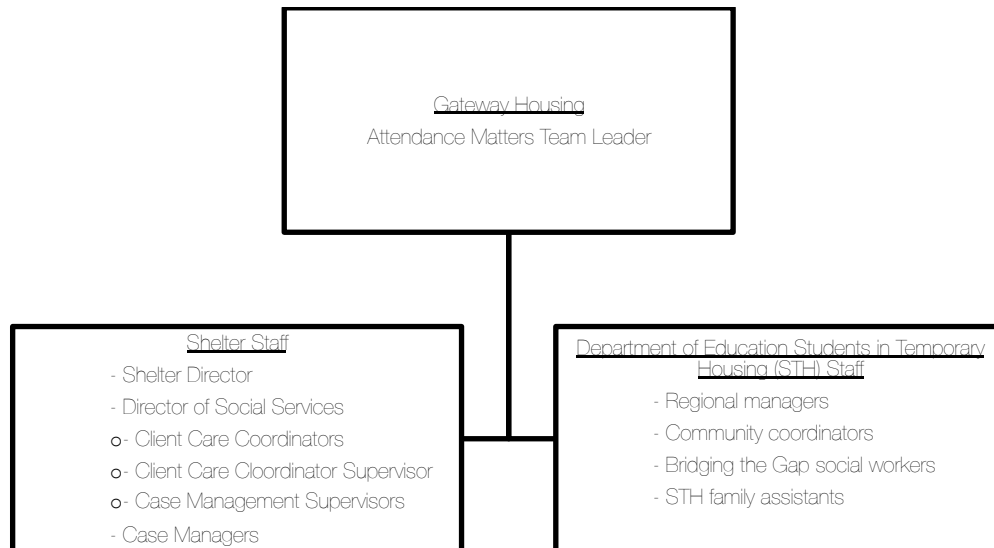


CHART 2

- **The Attendance Matters Leader** is a new position created for and funded by the pilot who assists all Attendance Matters pilot teams. The Attendance Matters Leader leads a weekly team meeting at each shelter site, helps the teams use data to identify and review cases, keeps progress notes on all open cases, follows up with and coaches team members, and helps with problem solving of cases, including escalating issues that require higher-up, systemic solutions. The AM Leader manages communications

and ensures that participating schools local to the shelters are informed and kept up-to-date on the work and progress of the Attendance Matters teams, at times meeting with school principals, DOE STH Community Coordinators and other school staff members, or inviting them to AM team meetings, as appropriate. The AM Leader establishes relationships with the DOE Regional Managers located in the borough STH offices, and encourages team members to engage families in their efforts to improve school attendance. The AM Leader also organizes and hosts events at the shelter, including informational parent education sessions and celebrations recognizing families whose children have good and/or improved school attendance.

- **The Shelter Director** plays a critical role in Attendance Matters: his or her presence at meetings emphasizes to shelter staff that school attendance is a priority, and the director's more clearly defined authority supplements and supports the AM Team Leader (who, being from a separate organization, must rely primarily on the power of persuasion). The Shelter Director's experience and leadership are often invaluable to teams' efforts to problem solve and address individual family cases.
- **Client Care Coordinators** and their supervisors are Licensed Master and Clinical Social Workers (LMSWs and LCSWs), and a relatively new addition to the New York City shelter workforce. Funded by the de Blasio administration's ThriveNYC mental health initiative, Client Care Coordinators play an important role on the Attendance Matters team. Sometimes called ThriveNYC social workers, these clinically trained staff members have Masters degree-level social work training, helping to ensure that solutions the team develops are appropriate and realistic for the families served. Their insights regarding the clinical features of challenges facing homeless parents and children are a valuable asset to the Attendance Matters teams. As part of their regular work responsibilities, Client Care Coordinators conduct biopsychosocial assessments of families in shelters.
- **Additional Shelter Staff** on each Attendance Matters team vary, as determined by the shelter director at each site. Directors are encouraged to assign staff of different responsibility levels, such as case managers, case management supervisors and directors of social services, as appropriate. These staff members should be the most familiar with the families and their daily lives and challenges. Shelter staff members working directly with families who have children with chronic school absenteeism are encouraged to participate in Attendance Matters team meetings, particularly when their assigned children are being discussed.
- **STH Family Assistants** are DOE employees assigned to work on-site in shelters, including all of the shelters participating in the pilot program. They are important members of the Attendance Matters team, as they bring knowledge and information about DOE and the schools that shelter staff may not have, including additional data about children's attendance, education status and school performance available only in the DOE data system. Family Assistants also play a key role in the school choice decision-making process. If a child is going to remain in his or her school of origin, the selection often entails working with the Family Assistant to set up a workable travel plan (which can involve public transportation or special DOE STH busing). Family Assistants play an active role in AM team trouble-shooting when issues arise.
- **Other DOE Staff:** Over the past year, in an effort to increase support for students living in temporary housing, DOE has expanded the types and number of staff focused on the needs of students in temporary housing. DOE has added 12 STH Regional Managers (for a total 18), 107 STH Community Coordinators (a new staff position at DOE), and 31 Bridging the Gap Social Workers (for a total of 100, assigned to schools with high percentages of STH children). Each of these staff positions is important to the Attendance Matters teams.

- **DOE STH Regional Managers** sit in on weekly AM team meetings about once a month, to provide insight and support to STH staff they oversee, including Bridging the Gap Social Workers, Community Coordinators and Family Assistants. Regional Managers help troubleshoot the most challenging cases, particularly those that require administrative interventions at DOE.
- **DOE STH Community Coordinators** are based in schools with concentrated STH populations, and act as liaisons between school and shelter-based staff. They provide logistical support to the AM teams, and act as advocates for families prioritized for AM assistance in shelter.
- **DOE Bridging The Gap Social Workers** are also based in schools with concentrated STH populations, and act as a bridge between the school and shelter-based staff, providing clinical (rather than logistical) support to the families and children in need.

Ensuring homeless children's school attendance has long been a responsibility of all these DOE and DHS-contracted staff positions. But before the Attendance Matters initiative, regional and school-based DOE staff and shelter-based DHS provider staff largely worked separately on the issue, with little interaction between the agencies. By coordinating these staff members' efforts, and building a team approach, the Attendance Matters pilot increased the sum result of these efforts. DOE and DHS continue to build on these efforts, and are rapidly improving coordination between the two agencies.

2. Use of Data to Identify Students and Track Progress - Regular team meetings are the most essential element of Attendance Matters, and these team meetings are built around better use of data. Each weekly meeting begins with a team review of the most recent attendance data. Much of this data is available in a report in the DHS Client Assistance and Rehousing Enterprise System (CARES) case management database system. The existing system showed the last four weeks of each child's school attendance. But to make this process more efficient and effective, Gateway Housing worked with DHS to redesign the report to provide more context, so that it also showed the last five days of each child's school attendance. Using data in real time in this way allows the team to immediately recognize when absences are becoming a problem for a child or family in the shelter, helps the team focus resources, and provides insight into the success or failure of interventions.

The first year of the pilot program spent time testing and learning the best ways to access and review the data. During this time, one of the provider organizations developed a tool for their Attendance Matters team that extracts and compiles the weekly data from the DHS CARES report and displays a child's school attendance rates over time, as the school year progresses. This proved so useful that Gateway Housing worked with the other providers to produce similar tracking tools for their teams and organizations.

The AM teams use the attendance data reports to identify children in the shelter who are experiencing high or chronic absenteeism. In their discussions, they prioritize children with the highest absentee rates, but work to resolve both simple and complex issues preventing children from attending school. The teams also use the data to identify children who have good attendance, so they can celebrate them and their families at shelter events with certificates for children with perfect and improved attendance.

Regularly reviewing data as a team permits members from different organizations to share additional information they know about students and families that would normally be available only to the school or to the shelter provider, including demographic, work, residential and other information about the parents and children from the CARES system, as well as school-related information from DOE, including any special needs of students. This information is supplemented by the Client Care Coordinators' biopsychosocial assessments, and observations of the families by the individual team members.

3. Training in Evidence-Based Practices - The Attendance Matters model offers formal trainings by outside practitioners to give team members additional skills and knowledge in three specific areas: motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, and navigating the New York City education system. The first two courses have been provided by the NYU School of Medicine Child Study Center and the Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) Training Institute, leaders in social service sector training in New York City. Working with Gateway Housing, CUCS and NYU modified their courses to fit the circumstances specific to homeless families in shelters, and to focus on addressing school attendance and related issues. The modified courses include case histories and other examples related to the work of the AM teams. Trainings on the DOE system are offered by Advocates For Children of New York. Courses are delivered on-site at each of the shelters. Trainings began in September 2018; to accommodate expected staff turnover, the training courses are offered several times during the year. These training sessions supplement similar trainings offered to staff by DHS. Attendance Matters trainings include:

- **Motivational Interviewing (MI)** is an evidence-based practice developed by Miller and Rollnick that helps people recognize and address problem behaviors (present or potential), and get them moving along the path to change. Motivational interviewing is intended to help resolve ambivalence and create an openness to change, as a prelude to accepting additional services and further therapeutic work. The AM training provides team members with an introduction to the basic principles and skills associated with MI, including expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, and avoiding common roadblocks to change.
- **Trauma-Informed Care** is an evidence-based engagement technique that recognizes the presence and influence of trauma histories in the lives of people receiving services. The high incidence of trauma among homeless families shape those families' responses to services. This training provides an introduction to the new diagnostic criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other trauma-related disorders, as well as other symptoms and behaviors resulting from trauma. Assessment, safety issues, medication and symptom management are explored at both case management and programmatic levels. Training attendees acquire a better understanding of trauma-informed care and the clinical skills needed to support persons healing and recovering from trauma histories.
- **New York City Education System trainings** are offered by Advocates for Children of New York, a nonprofit organization that supports at-risk children in the education system, and is deeply involved in ensuring that appropriate programs and services are in place for New York City students in temporary housing. These training sessions have been offered quarterly at each shelter during the school year, as modules on a variety of topics, including:
 - **Where to find help at school:** an overview of the DOE, the education system in general, and how New York City school supports are structured and can be accessed;
 - **Educational rights of New York City students in shelters:** the basics of federal and local regulations, with an emphasis on school stability and trouble-shooting transportation issues;
 - **DOE processes and services for children with special needs:** the Independent Education Plan (IEP) process, IEP forms and reports, services offered at schools, special education schools;
 - **School discipline and suspensions:** types of disciplinary actions, what suspension means, student access to education while suspended.

The Attendance Matters trainings supplement and reorient the work of the teams to an approach that employs evidence-based practices and improved understanding of the challenges faced by homeless children and families. Training team members together helps to unify teams and give them a common vocabulary and toolkit with which to engage the families and children served by the program.

4. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

SHELTERS PARTICIPATING IN THE ATTENDANCE MATTERS PILOT

Three nonprofit shelter providers participated in the first year of the Attendance Matters pilot program: HELP USA, BronxWorks and Win, Inc. Each of these organizations designated two of their shelters to participate in the pilot. An additional provider and shelter site were added in the second year of the initiative, the CAMBA Flagstone Family Residence.

The pilot was originally structured so that each organization would implement the Attendance Matters program model at one shelter and designate another shelter that did not follow the model, to be studied as a comparison site. However, during the second half of the school year, Gateway Housing became aware of an interesting phenomenon: at two of the organizations, the pilot site and the comparison shelter share key supervisory staff, including the Client Care Coordinator Supervisor. As a result, practices of the Attendance Matters model seen as successful were being implemented at the comparison sites.

Also, during this time the outcomes evaluation team developed a more robust methodology to compare the Attendance Matters pilot shelters to similar shelters in the homeless family shelter system. After assessing the Attendance Matters Leader's work schedule, Gateway Housing decided to add the comparison shelters as Pilot Program sites. Table 1 displays the capacity of the six pilot shelters, with the three added after the initial start in *italics*.

Table 3. Attendance Matters Pilot Program Shelters

Provider Organizations	Designated Shelters	# Family Units	K-5	6-8	9-12	Total Kids in School
BronxWorks	Nelson	79	83	26	38	147
	<i>Jackson (Fall 2018)</i>	95	73	26	11	110
Help USA	Crotona 1	96	74	21	19	114
	<i>Crotona 2 (Spring 2019)</i>	33	21	11	3	35
Women in Need	Junius	216	206	104	86	396
<i>CAMBA</i>	<i>Flagstone (Fall 2019)</i>	158	148	65	94	307

Of note, New York City students who reside in shelters have the choice to remain in their “school of origin” (the school they attended before moving to shelter), or transferring to a school close to the homeless shelter in which they have been placed. While the schools with the highest numbers of students in temporary housing are geographically close to shelters, homeless children attend schools in every school district.²⁶ The Attendance Matters Leader, working with Family Assistants, has engaged the schools deemed local to each of the Attendance Matters shelters.

Local schools to the AM sites include:

- BronxWorks Nelson: PS 170, PS 303, PS 70
- BronxWorks Jackson: PS 65
- Help USA Crotona 1 and Crotona 2: PS 411 (CS), PS 10, PS 352, East Bronx Academy for the Future (CS)
- Win Junius and CAMBA Flagstone: Christopher Avenue Community School, PS328, PS150, PS298

Very few of the schools attended by children in the Attendance Matters pilot are part of the NYC DOE Community Schools (CS) initiative. Community schools have enhanced resources and staff (including on-site therapists, physicians and additional social workers) to better address the educational inequities faced by low-income students (with a particular focus on students in temporary housing). In the rare instances when the AM and CS initiatives had students in common, the AM Leader engaged Community School principals and staff to ensure the needs of AM children with poor attendance were identified and addressed.

Notably, the BronxWorks Nelson Family Residence and the HELP USA Crotona 1 and 2 shelters are in school districts with the second and third highest number of students in temporary housing. And importantly, the Christopher Avenue Community School is a Community School in name only. It is not part of the official DOE Community School program, and thus does not have all of the rich resources commonly available at a DOE Community School.

FIRST YEAR IMPLEMENTATION

The first year of the Attendance Matters pilot initiative began in July 2018, and coincided with the 2018-19 school year. Activities pursued and milestones achieved during the year included the following:

Hiring the AM Leader: The Attendance Matters program pilot initiative began with the July 2018 hiring of the AM Leader, who is responsible for overseeing the initiative on-site, predominantly at shelters and sometimes at schools. The Attendance Matters Leader was intentionally hired as an employee of Gateway Housing, to allow the position to remain independent of DOE, DHS and shelter provider staff. This independence has proven to be valuable during the first year of the pilot, allowing the AM Leader to serve as an honest broker between agencies and systems, in a position to elevate systemic issues to responsible officials in those systems. This independence has also proven helpful in the second year of the pilot, as the AM Leader contributes to efforts to disseminate and replicate the program.

Formation of AM Teams: Soon after the AM Leader was brought on board, work began with each of the participating shelter providers and DOE workers, to determine which staff would become members of the AM teams. Few requirements were laid out to participating organizations, but consensus grew organically that all the teams would give primary roles to the shelters' Client Care Coordinators and the DOE Family Assistants working out of the shelters.

Defining Staff Roles: As the year progressed, staff roles became clear. The shelter provider's case managers and DOE's shelter-based Family Assistants took the lead in resolving simpler, logistical or administrative problems. Systemic DOE issues were investigated and often resolved by higher-level DOE supervisors, like Regional Managers and Community Coordinators. School-based DOE Bridging The Gap social workers were often useful in resolving more complex, clinical issues related to families' behavioral health problems and other special needs, but the Client Care Coordinators employed by the shelter provider most often took the lead resolving these more complex challenges. In all cases, solutions were achieved by multiple team members working in coordination as part of an interagency collaboration.

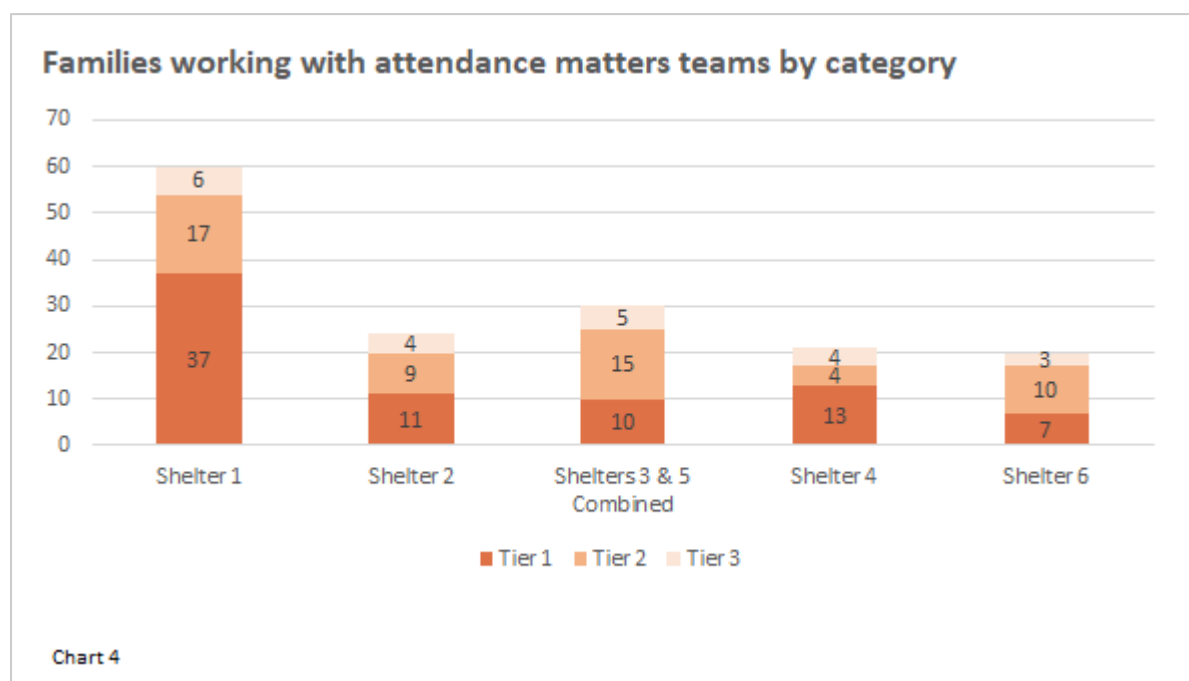
Teams found that clinical staff recently added by the de Blasio administration at both DHS and DOE – in particular the shelter providers' Client Care Coordinator positions – provide essential support to the Attendance Matters initiative. They also reported that the program becomes noticeably more effective when DOE supervisory staff members are committed to the goals of the AM initiative. Many of the solutions to the cases turn out to be relatively simple, but a good number are not. Almost all require an interagency, multi-disciplinary team like Attendance Matters offers to ensure that any and all issues can be addressed.

Kick-offs and Other Events: Kicking off the school year at a shelter often means having an event to distribute donated backpacks and school supplies. At the AM shelter sites, the AM Leader and team increased the impact of

these occasions by inviting representatives from a variety of DOE offices to attend and provide critical information to families and shelter staff, on topics ranging from transportation and registration, to securing services for special needs children. Later in the school year, the AM teams held additional, increasingly popular, celebratory events, with pizza and gift certificates, to honor students with good and improved attendance.

Prioritizing Assistance: When the teams first began to meet, the AM Leader directed them to focus on the elementary school children in each shelter beginning the school year with the most absences. Under the AM Leader’s guidance, the teams became familiar with using the weekly attendance report data to identify the children most in need of assistance. Each week, the team selected cases and assigned primary responsibility to appropriate team members, reviewed next steps, and mapped out activities for the rest of the week. Having staff with diverse expertise from both the shelters and schools brought new information and solutions to the table. Some cases were resolved quickly. More complex cases, involving multiple children and family challenges, required hours of staff time, and could take months to address.

After three months, the AM Leader realized that the families with the most complex challenges could monopolize staff members’ time, leaving them little opportunity to assist families with fewer barriers who could still benefit from the intervention. By asking the teams to concentrate their efforts solely on the students with the most severely chronic absenteeism, the program was forgoing the opportunity to assist students with less severe, but still chronic absences. Many of these students faced challenges fairly simple to address, like changing school registrations, arranging transportation, or having clean clothes to wear each morning. At this point in the pilot, the teams were asked to divide their efforts between students with severe chronic absenteeism (less than 80% attendance) and students with chronic absenteeism (from 80% to 89% attendance). For families and children in need of a stronger clinical intervention, the AM teams worked with shelter staff to facilitate placement of the families into supportive housing, where they can receive appropriate, ongoing services. By the end of Year 1, the families at each site in the AM caseload were prioritized into Tiers 1 (most complex) to 3 (less challenged), as shown in the table below.



Training: By the third week of October, AM teams at all three shelter locations had been trained in the evidence-based practices Motivational Interviewing and Trauma-Informed Care by the Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) Training Institute. Both DOE and nonprofit shelter provider staff attended the trainings, which were held on-site at each shelter. Another series of trainings, on navigating the NYC DOE system, were offered in October and December by Advocates For Children of New York, at each of the three locations. In all cases, the trainings were offered to every member of the team, and members were encouraged to train as a team unit (though this was not always possible, given staff schedules and other job commitments). Team members found the practical information offered in the Advocates For Children training immediately helpful, though the clinical practice trainings were also useful in establishing a common programmatic understanding among the team members.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The Attendance Matters program encountered a number of challenges over the course of the first year of implementation. Some were anticipated; others unexpected. Challenges that had the most impact on program implementation included:

Staffing Vacancies: At times during the AM pilot's first year, vacant staffing lines at both the shelter provider and DOE reduced the effectiveness of the AM teams' at many of the sites. The lack of appropriate staff available to respond to any and all problems encountered by the teams corresponded to an increase in absences of the children served by the AM program, particularly those who had the most complex, time-consuming challenges. The relatively new Client Care Coordinator masters-level social work positions have been a challenge for DHS providers to fill and keep filled at some locations.

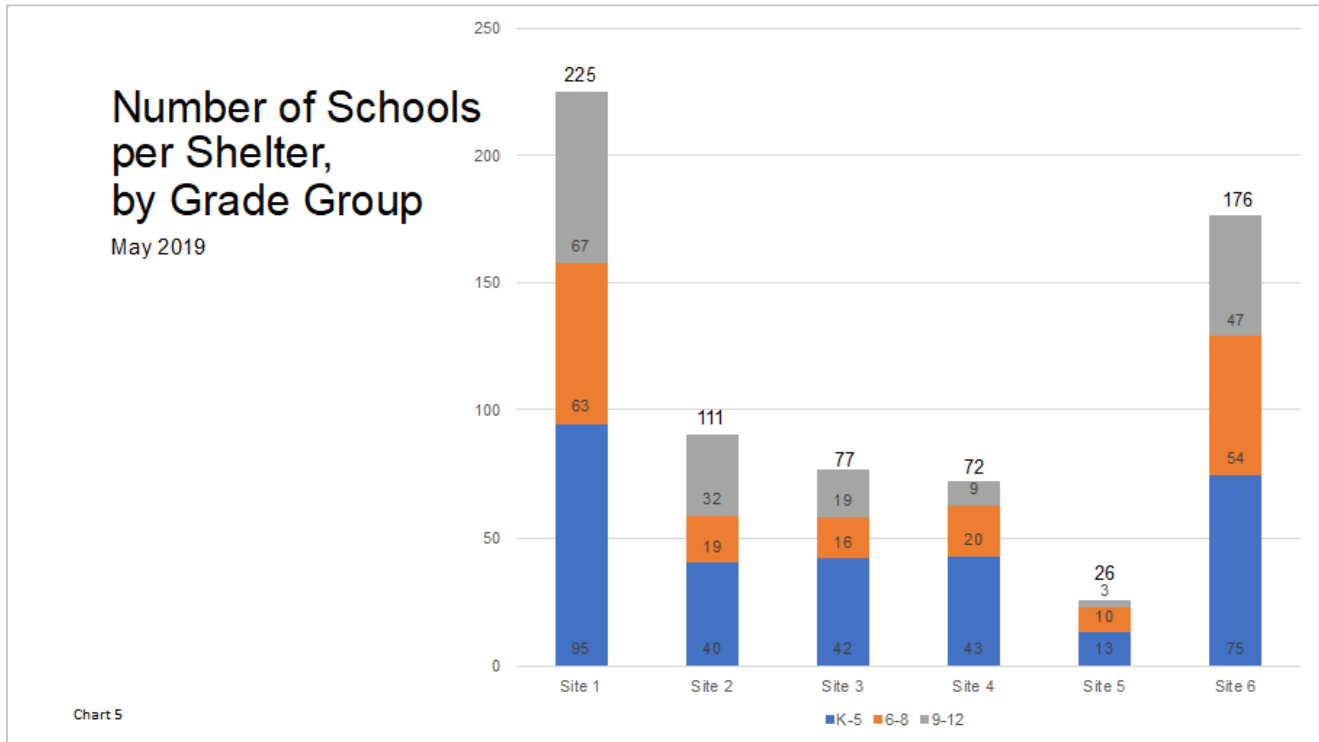
Consistent Implementation: Different circumstances at the three shelters led to uneven implementation early in the program. Two of the shelters were quickly able to begin implementation early in the school year. However, one of the shelters started more slowly, due to staff turnover and early uncertainty over roles. These issues were resolved within the first two months of implementation, and the program has since taken hold at all of the original pilot shelter sites. When the AM program is replicated, close oversight in the critical first weeks and monitoring of program fidelity are necessary to ensure successful implementation at all sites.

Seasonal Challenges: Throughout the school year, the teams successfully intervened in scores of cases, measurably improving the school attendance of many individual students. But the teams also found that certain events and seasonal dynamics influenced attendance more than expected. Holiday weeks were notable for a general decrease in attendance, and a February cold snap reduced attendance across the board, as some children were unable to get to school on particularly cold mornings. Likewise, attendance dips across the school system as a whole when the school year comes to a gradual close in June. In addition, shelters with high turnover of families often saw significant increases in absenteeism, as the disruption experienced by newly-arrived families often causes absences to spike in the shelter's attendance data.

Access to Healthcare: The AM teams found that more absences than anticipated were caused by children's chronic health conditions, with an especially high incidence of asthma. Having healthcare services readily available on-site at the shelter made the teams more effective and better able to respond quickly to daily barriers students encounter. But some of the AM program shelters do not have room for on-site clinics, making chronic health conditions at those sites harder to address. Recent efforts by DHS to link these shelters to community-based clinics are expected to improve these sheltered families' access to healthcare.

Large Families: The Attendance Matters teams found that, as a general rule, larger families in shelter tend to face more complex challenges, and may benefit most from the clinical supports DOE and DHS-contracted social workers can provide. However, large families' more extensive needs can overwhelm DHS-contracted Client Care Coordinators' capacity to serve them, as the position's staff to client ratio is set at one Client Care Coordinator for every 25 families, regardless of the number of children, and level of need, in each family. As a result, the high

number of children at some of the shelters has strained the capacity of the Attendance Matters teams, particularly when children in the shelter attend many different schools, often far from the shelter (under the federal McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, families have the right to keep children in their school of origin after becoming homeless). At one AM program site, more than 400 children attend over 220 different schools (see Chart 5). This can negatively impact the ability of an Attendance Matters team to provide the support that the children and families need to ensure good school attendance.



5. EVALUATION

Gateway Housing is funded by the JP Morgan Chase Foundation to evaluate the short- and long-term outcomes of the Attendance Matters model and two-year pilot. The independent evaluation will compare data about children and families at the pilot sites with children and families in similar shelters in the DHS system not participating in the AM initiative. Taking a quasi-experimental approach, the formal evaluation will provide more conclusive evidence on the Attendance Matters program's impact on school attendance and other outcomes. The Logic Model in Table 6 below guides the evaluation and lists the many outcomes to consider.

Principal Investigators: Gateway Housing has contracted with Social Policy Analytics, a social policy research firm led by Dan Treglia, PhD., to act as principal investigator of the Attendance Matters program. Dr. Treglia is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice, and will be working closely with Jay Bainbridge, PhD, associate professor of Public Administration at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY. Previous to their current positions, both served in the New York City's Department of Homeless Services, Dr. Bainbridge as the Assistant Commissioner of Policy & Planning, and Dr. Treglia as Deputy Director of Research. Both have designed and conducted experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of programs addressing homelessness and their impacts through primary survey data, qualitative interviews and administrative records from New York City DHS, HRA, Administration for Children's Services (ACS), New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the Veterans' Administration (VA). Drs. Treglia and Bainbridge will be supported in data management and analysis by Mike Cassidy, a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University specializing in applied microeconomic analyses of homelessness and education.

Evaluation Structure: Drs. Treglia and Bainbridge are using a mixed-methods approach, combining DOE attendance data matched to the DHS shelter census, quantitative administrative data from relevant city agencies, and interviews with families who have experienced the Attendance Matters program. Key to the evaluation is a collaboration with the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), a research and policy center located in the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York and led by Maryanne Schretzman. Dr. Samuels provides additional assistance to the evaluation, by managing several aspects of the qualitative data collection and analyses examining the implementation of, and fidelity to, the Attendance Matters program model. Quantitative outcomes will be evaluated using multivariate regression, controlling for differences in families, schools, placement types and facilities. Qualitative data, collected during interviews with parents of children in Attendance Matters shelters, will be coded to reveal prevailing themes, and be used to contextualize and expand on quantitative results.

Implementation/Fidelity Evaluation Study: The evaluation team is also conducting an ongoing evaluation of how the AM program model is being implemented at the different sites, and the degree to which there are variations to how different teams follow the model. Using qualitative data collection methods, this model fidelity study was conducted in Year 1 of the pilot.

Interagency Workgroup: An important component of the evaluation is an interagency workgroup comprised of representatives from Gateway Housing and the evaluation team, CIDI, DSS, DHS, DOE and the participating shelter providers. The workgroup meets every two to four months to review preliminary program data in order to identify and troubleshoot issues around the implementation of the AM program. Mirroring the AM Team meetings in the shelters, the diverse skill sets and perspectives around the table make the workgroup an effective forum for addressing systemic and management issues affecting the program. In Year 2, the initiative began experimenting with government-only and provider-only workgroup meetings, supplemented by meetings of data specialists within the provider organizations.

Progress of the Independent Evaluation: The independent evaluators worked with members of the interagency workgroup to finalize the evaluation protocol. Importantly, the protocol uses an adaptive design

approach, meaning that the qualitative evaluation allowed the team to regularly appraise model fidelity and immediately incorporate findings into the design and implementation of the Attendance Matters program during the pilot's execution.

Because the evaluation depends on data from DOE that only recently became available, the Year 1 independent evaluation report will not be completed until Fall of 2020. The primary outcome of interest to the evaluation will be the Attendance Matters program's impact on school attendance, comparing the pilot shelters with other shelters throughout the city. Other outcomes, like shelter use and other measures of familial stability, may be assessed, depending on data availability. Outcomes from the first-year evaluation are expected to reflect program model changes that occurred as the initiative was refined. A second, more comprehensive independent evaluation of the Attendance Matters pilot will be completed when Year 2 data becomes available in 2021.

Table 6. Attendance Matters Pilot Program Logic Model

Inputs	AM Program Elements	Proposed Outcomes – Year 1*		
		Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYC Families at 6 Tier II shelters i • Children in K-12 <p>Shelter Staff: CM supervisors, Thrive/social service staff, shelter director</p> <p>DOE Staff: Family Assistants, STH Regional Mgrs, BTG Social Workers , STH Community Coordinators</p> <p>Local Schools: School based social workers and administrators</p> <p>AM Leader</p> <p>Interagency work group: CIDI, HRA/DHS, DOE.</p> <p>Data: Weekly shelter attendance report, DOE ATS reports, provider data tracking tools, shelter census, CARES Notes, IEP’s, medical records (HIPAA consent)</p> <p>Add’l resources: small monthly cash allowances</p>	<p>Team meetings: Weekly to address issues related to chronic absenteeism. AM Leader will provide attendance progress tracking tools and support to team by engaging other professionals as needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure immediate school enrollment/attendance upon shelter move-in. • Provide ongoing support as needed (cash funds avail.). • Celebrate students/families with excellent attendance (cash funds can be used). <p>AM Leader tracks attendance during 3 periods: transition into shelter, shelter residence, transition to perm. housing.</p> <p>AM Leader will track attendance-related issues, team solutions, challenges outside team’s control.</p> <p>AM Leader to engage local stakeholders: schools (principals, teachers) and local nonprofits (afterschool programs, healthcare, legal).</p> <p>Interagency work group meetings: AM Leader to provide progress reports, successes and challenges.</p> <p>Training: Inter-agency teams formed at shelters. Team trainings include: Motivational Interviewing, DOE/Navigating NYC School System, Special Education IEP’s/504, DOE Discipline Policy & Student Rights, Transportation. CE credits available.</p>	<p>Primary</p> <p>Improve Attendance (ST)*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in # children with severe chronic absences from the year prior to Attendance Matters • Reduction effort concentrated on children in grades K-8. 	<p>Secondary</p> <p>For children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase school achievement: grade advancement, school performance at grade level (MT)* • Decrease ACS involvement (education neglect) (MT)* • Continued school achievement post shelter (LT)* <p>For families establishing school attendance routines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce family chaos (ST)* • Increase parents’ ability to meet Individualized Learning Plan goals (MT)* • Reduce LOS (LT)* • Improve housing stability (LT)* 	<p>Tertiary</p> <p>For children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase likelihood for high school graduation (LT)* <p>For families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income security (LT)* • Reduced likelihood of return to shelter (LT)*
<p>*Outcomes</p> <p>ST: Short Term MT: Medium Term LT: Long Term</p>	<p>Mediating Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with IEPs, or in process of getting and IEP • Parent challenges such as ACE score, mental health, health challenges • Family characteristics: size, length of stay in shelter, homeless history • Housing placement type • School transfers • Parent work status at baseline • Benefits at baseline 			

6. INITIAL FINDINGS

After the two years of the pilot, there are already many stories of individual child and family school attendance improvements. These successes are supported by the program data used by the teams to track attendance. While not yet confirmed by the independent evaluation, these preliminary results show promising improvements to homeless children's school attendance, and offer interesting insights into the program's first-year implementation.

Early Successes: A review of the preliminary program data of the pilot showed promising improvements at participating shelters. Comparing attendance data from May 2019 (towards the end of the pilot's first school year), with data from May 2018 (before the Attendance Matters program was introduced at the sites), the percentage of children with good attendance (90% or better attendance) improved at all four shelters participating in year one, year over year. More to the point, the combined percentage of students with chronic (less than 90%) and severely chronic (less than 80%) absenteeism declined at all four first-year program sites. Even more encouraging, three of the four sites achieved reductions in severely chronic absenteeism. Promisingly, these improvements occurred during the first year of the pilot, when the program model was still being adjusted and adapted in response to unanticipated environmental factors, including substantial staffing vacancies at some of the pilot sites. Despite these challenges, each of the sites appeared to see significant improvements to attendance. The preliminary program data showed continuing improvements in the second year of the pilot. These initial indications are now being investigated by the independent evaluation.

One of the participating shelter providers documented school attendance in three of its shelters during the first year of Attendance Matters. The AM program was implemented at two of the shelters, while the third shelter did not participate in the pilot, and instead provided the usual services offered in the DHS shelter system.

The preliminary data showed that the two shelters receiving the intervention had many weeks where attendance in the current year was much improved over the previous year. In contrast, the shelter without the intervention had attendance rates that were very similar across the two years.

Another shelter provider participating in Attendance Matters recorded similar outcomes in its data, with its AM shelter sites experiencing an increase in attendance compared to the previous year, and other shelters not participating in the program showing no improvement. Analyzing the school attendance of children in its AM shelters, this provider found that cumulative absences among K-5 students were reduced in 2018-19 (the AM program year) as compared to the previous school year (before AM was implemented).

CONFIRMING PROGRAM DESIGN ASSUMPTIONS

The first year of the Attendance Matters initiative has provided valuable information and insights on the school attendance and absenteeism of homeless students. Importantly, the implementation experience suggested that three premises of the program model's design are valid:

:

1. That a shelter-based intervention designed to improve the school attendance of homeless children can be implemented.
2. That poor school attendance is often an indicator of deeper familial, health and behavioral health challenges.
3. That addressing school attendance issues is an effective way for social service staff to initiate and build strong relationships with homeless families in order to address the more complex challenges they face.

Unsurprisingly, Attendance Matters teams found that the children with the lowest rates of school attendance are likely to face the most complex and greatest number of challenges. The AM teams found that whether poor school attendance preceded, or began with, the shelter stay did not have much bearing on how the team

responded. Rather, the implementation experience suggests the most critical aspect of the ensuing intervention was that the AM team members work together, to gather and share information, and to develop customized plans to address identified issues quickly and effectively.

Regardless of whether the independent evaluation eventually confirms the AM program as an evidence-based intervention, the initiative has already improved our understanding of school absenteeism among homeless children, and demonstrated ways to increase coordination between shelters and schools to address the problem.

REASONS FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS' ABSENTEEISM

In its first year, Attendance Matters identified the most frequent causes of school absences among the children served by the program, as well as pragmatic strategies to address them. Below is a list of the seven most frequent causes for absenteeism identified by the Attendance Matters teams, and the interventions used by the teams to solve these challenges. It is important to note that these issues often overlap, and many homeless students encounter multiple barriers to attending school regularly that are often exacerbated by transportation and other logistical issues. In descending order of importance, the most common reasons for absenteeism encountered by the AM teams included:

- **Behavioral and Physical Health Issues of Parents:** Parents' mental health has a great impact on family functioning, including children's school attendance. And the traumatic experience of becoming homeless, along with the sometimes challenging shelter environment, can exacerbate mental health issues. Poor physical health can also inhibit parents' ability to look after their children. **To address these issues:** AM teams' clinical staff members have used poor school attendance to help them identify and support families with a parent in need of mental health services. In addition, teams have developed procedures to ensure that parents with serious mental and physical health issues are prioritized for assistance applying to placement into supportive housing.
- **Poor Physical and Mental Health of Students:** Approximately thirty percent of the students in the AM shelter sites participate in the DOE's Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with special needs, have DOE "504 Plans" (designating accommodations for children with disabilities), or have been identified as requiring evaluation for these programs. Transportation problems can be particularly challenging for students with special needs, who may also not attend school because they and/or their parents believe the current placement is not a good fit. Some also miss school while they are awaiting approval of their IEP or 504 plan and school placement. **To address these issues:** Attendance Matters contracted with Advocates For Children of New York to provide training to teams with general information about how IEPs and 504 plans work at DOE, and how they and the child's parent can advocate for the child's needs during IEP meetings. Evaluations for these plans are complex, have many steps, and can be overwhelming for parents in the most stable conditions. For families living in shelters, often far from their personal social supports, the assistance of an AM team member can be essential. In several cases where students with special needs were missing school on a regular basis, Attendance Matters teams successfully advocated to have the children reevaluated to ensure the students' needs were being met, with some transferred to other schools that better supported the children's needs.
- **DOE Enrollment and Administrative Challenges:** All the Attendance Matters teams have encountered enrollment and administrative issues working with DOE. The most common involve action items, like registrations, evaluations and transfers, not processed in a timely or proper manner, especially related to IEPs for students with special needs. **To address these issues:** in addition to the aforementioned staff trainings, the teams have taken a variety of actions to acknowledge students' rights, including hosting workshops for parents on the IEP process, and bringing together representatives from multiple agencies to solve specific case problems. In one example, a homeless child's difficulties with verbal communication were not being addressed at the school, leaving the child to spend over a month receiving very limited instruction in the school's office, instead of the classroom. The AM team worked

with DOE's Special Education Unit, Advocates For Children and shelter staff to advocate for the proper implementation of the child's 504 plan to accommodate her disability. Through the collective efforts of DOE and the team, all of the requirements of the student's IEP and 504 plans were finally out into place.

- **Challenges Facing Families with Infant Children:** Older siblings of families with an infant child often have issues with school attendance, particularly in the winter months, when many parents are hesitant to take their infant children out in the cold weather and have no one else to bring their older children to school. As a result, school-aged siblings often stay home on cold days. **To address these issues:** AM teams encourage and assist parents to get help from members of their social support networks, to either watch the infant or take the older children to school. AM teams are advocating for extending onsite drop-off childcare hours at shelters, so that an infant can be cared for while the parent escorts school-aged children to school.
- **Other Childcare Issues.** Even one family member's illness can easily cause all children in a homeless family to be absent from school, particularly if they require a parent to get them there. With DHS rules prohibiting parents from leaving children unattended at shelters, if a single parent needs to stay at the shelter to care for a sick child, he or she cannot take the child's siblings to school. Shelters do not provide childcare services for sick children, and the AM teams have seen older teenage children miss school to stay in the shelter and take care of siblings, when a younger child is sick, or when he or she is not yet attending school and the parent needs to work. **To address these issues:** the AM teams are problem-solving individual childcare challenges, and advocating for changes in shelter childcare policies.
- **Initial Transition to Shelter and Children's Presence at Social Service Appointments:** When first applying to DHS for shelter, homeless families must bring all children to the DHS Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center in the Bronx for interviews and processing. While the DHS policy was revised in November 2016 to require the entire family appear only for the first application interview, many homeless parents continue to bring their children to all appointments. These may occur over two or more days, when a family is given a "conditional placement" while their homeless status is investigated. **To address these issues:** AM teams counsel families about the PATH policy, and about the importance of children continuing to attend school during the conditional placement period and when parents must attend other social service appointments. The teams help the families to arrange ways to get the children to and from school while parents attend appointments. In addition, during the pandemic, DHS has implemented a system of virtual interviews over the internet that eliminates the need for children to be present at any interviews.
- **Long-Distance and Local Transportation Challenges:** Getting to school is a significant barrier for homeless students who have moved far from their home neighborhoods, but remain enrolled in their schools of origin. Many of the attendance problems at the beginning of the first AM school year were related to city-provided busing for children in shelters. Getting to school is also an issue for some younger students who attend schools close to the shelters. If no one in the household is willing or able to walk the child to school, that child will often not go. Parents can ask another shelter resident to walk their child to school, but this requires completing and signing a permission form. **To address these issues:** the AM teams invited OPT staff to attendance education fairs at the shelters where they were able to solve some transportation issues there on site. For the remaining cases, AM teams shared busing routes and pickup times with parents and helped them keep to the schedules. Family Assistants and Client Care Coordinators also helped families contact the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) and private bus companies to report and resolve student pickup and dropoff issues. To walk children to local schools, the AM teams are asking all sheltered families with children in local schools to sign permission forms in advance, allowing a neighbor in the shelter to walk their child to school when necessary. They have also worked with families to allow middle school children to bring their younger siblings with them to local schools.

7. EARLY OBSERVATIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first year of Attendance Matters, the AM teams learned critical lessons about what works, both to improve attendance, and to address other issues facing homeless families and children. They also identified several barriers to program success that could be eliminated or mitigated by changes in policy. These findings relate both specifically to the AM program, and to systemic issues affecting both DHS and DOE.

THE VALUE OF SPECIFIC AM COMPONENTS

The AM program experience suggest that many of the components of the AM program may have value:

- Holding weekly meetings between shelter and DOE staff to review attendance data helps to elevate attendance as an important goal, provides a forum for organizing and coordinating interagency efforts to get children to school, and could be integrated into the routines of all shelters serving families with school-aged children.
- Reviewing attendance data as a team allows shelters and schools to identify families likely to benefit from additional clinical support.
- Shelter staff families when given access to additional DOE information, like IEP records, teacher assessments and grade reports.
- Training staff together not only educates staff, but also helps to strengthen teams; logistical challenges can be overcome by offering trainings multiple times on-site at shelters.
- Access to flexible funding, allows teams to hold events to inform and celebrate the families and children in the program, as well as to respond rapidly to on-the-ground emergencies (like arranging backup transportation, doing laundry, or buying food).

STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the biggest challenges to implementing the Attendance Matters program have been related to staffing, both at the shelters and at the Department of Education. The pilot experience suggests the following recommendations could improve school attendance and other outcomes:

1. **Preserve and expand on-site clinical staff at shelters:** The licensed social workers in the shelter provider's Client Care Coordinator positions play a critical role in the AM program, responding to residents' behavioral health issues, as well as environmental challenges unique to living in shelter that can have significant impacts on children's mental and physical development. Currently funded through the ThriveNYC initiative, these positions should be baselined in the DHS model family shelter budget. In addition, the 1:25 staff to family ratio of the Client Care Coordinator program should be adjusted downward for larger shelters and for shelters serving larger families, both of which present a higher incidence of clinical challenges. Ideally, these positions should be supported by an expansion of additional, more specialized full- and part-time clinical staff, including psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists).
2. **Investigate and improve shelter staff retention:** The first year of Attendance Matters saw frequent staff vacancies at many of the shelters, particularly of Client Care Coordinators, as providers struggled to hire and retain qualified staff, especially at isolated and larger shelters serving more challenging populations. Lack of staff often had a negative impact on AM program performance and other shelter outcomes. DHS should investigate this issue and identify causes of hiring difficulties and short staff tenures, and institute measures to improve staff retention at shelters (including allowing providers to pay salary premiums for difficult postings).

3. **Hire more bilingual DOE and shelter staff:** Many shelters do not have enough – or sometimes any – staff members who speak languages other than English, making communications with families who speak other languages difficult, at best. Bilingual staff members are challenging to find and recruit. The city should incentivize shelter providers to hire more bilingual staff (including allowing higher salaries), with an emphasis on Spanish speakers. Similarly, hiring more bilingual Family Assistants, Community Coordinators and Bridging The Gap social workers at DOE will also improve engagement of families with limited proficiency in English.
4. **Permit lower DHS Client Care Coordinator staff-to-client ratios to account for family size:** The 1:25 staff-to-client ratio for the DHS-contracted Client Care Coordinator position is adequate for most family shelters. But shelters with large unit sizes that serve larger families with more children should be permitted a ratio of one Client Care Coordinator for every twenty families.
5. **Make more DOE staff available to shelter residents during summer months:** Most DOE employees do not work in the summer months. But summer brings an increase in newly homeless families, and parents in shelter must often spend the summer trying to get school situations settled before school begins in the Fall. DOE has begun to expand its staff presence in the shelter system during the summer months, and should build on these promising efforts to avoid enrollment and transportation problems early in the school year.
6. **Post additional DOE STH staff at larger shelters:** DOE has recently done much to increase its Students in Temporary Housing staff, by creating 107 new, year-round Community Coordinator positions in shelters, and 100 Bridging The Gap social workers at schools with high numbers of homeless students. However, homeless students living in shelters attend every school in the city, including many without Bridging The Gap social workers. More importantly, DOE staff posted at schools cannot assist homeless students who don't show up at the front door. We believe DOE will achieve even better outcomes by further expanding staff on site at larger shelters with more than 150 units that have many children attending many different schools.
7. **Expand DOE presence and role at PATH:** Newly homeless families must apply for shelter at the DHS Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) Center, which will determine their eligibility for homeless services, then assign and transport them to shelter. Homeless children often miss school in the first days after shelter placement, particularly when the family is placed on a conditional basis while their eligibility is being determined. DOE has one staff member at PATH and has plans to add another. DOE should ensure that there is enough around-the-clock staff presence with access to DOE systems in order to provide a mandatory check-in on attendance, enrollment and transportation issues for each family who enters PATH. Doing so can help families greatly minimize the disruptions during the first days of shelter placement.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to addressing the staffing issues above, the AM experience identified additional policy changes that would help improve the school attendance of homeless children:

1. **Continue efforts to ensure homeless families' connection to healthcare services:** The AM experience found that shelter residents in a pilot shelter with an on-site clinic benefited from the easy access to developmental screening, routine health support and immunizations, as well as mental health resources, such as services provided by psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and therapists. DHS should continue working to ensure that families are connected to healthcare services by developing linkages with community services.
2. **Distribute 30-day MetroCards to homeless families:** DOE offers one-day and sometimes weekly MetroCards to shelter residents when school-provided transportation is not available, and it is actively considering issuing cards for longer time periods. DOE should allow its workers to provide all families free

MetroCards with extended 30-day terms. Not having to ask or apply for a MetroCard at the time of the transit emergency could substantially improve school attendance for some families, by allowing parents to easily use the subway to transport children to school when problems arise with other transportation, or even when it makes sense to do so on a regular basis.

3. **Create protocols for walking to nearby schools:** Even families who choose to send their children to a nearby school face attendance challenges. When administrative appointments or other obligations prevent a parent from walking their child to school, there are few alternatives: shelter staff is not permitted to escort children off-site, and other shelter parents must have written permission to perform this task. While safety concerns and sheltered families' attendance at multiple schools complicate attempts to address this challenge, DHS, regulators and providers should work together to develop a standard protocol to help children get to school in these instances.
4. **Make on-site childcare more flexible:** When a parent has to stay home to care for a child, whether because they are ill or for other reasons, siblings are often absent because the parent cannot take them to school. DHS and providers should work together to facilitate more flexible childcare arrangements that make it easier for parents to have a child cared for while they take older siblings to school.

8. NEXT STEPS

With the Attendance Matters initiative now concluding the second year of its two-year pilot, Gateway Housing will take next steps to: complete the independent evaluation; disseminate findings from the pilot; and modify the program model to facilitate continuation and replication of the program.

YEAR 2 IMPLEMENTATION

In the second year of the Attendance Matters pilot, the continual adjustments of the first school year gave way to a more consistent program operation at the program shelter sites. Most shelter and school programs became fully staffed. Team members were trained, developed specific expertise and collaborated more closely. As a result, the teams felt they became more effective at addressing the full range of issues related to homeless students' school attendance.

The expansion in Year 2 to a sixth, very large shelter operated by a provider new to Attendance Matters encountered many of the same startup challenges faced by the other sites in Year 1, but with the prior year's experience, the AM management team was better able to anticipate, quickly identify and respond to these issues.

The initiative continued to offer a variety of trainings to Attendance Matters team members in the second year of the pilot. Advocates For Children of New York continued to provide trainings on navigating the DOE system, both as an introduction to the many new AM team members, and as a refresher to team members who have attended previous AFC trainings. Advocates for Children also offered information sessions about school-related issues directly to sheltered families. New trainings in service responses to trauma by the Child Study Center at the NYU School of Medicine proved popular with shelter staff and were offered again to both shelter provider and DOE staff.

One focus of the second year of the AM pilot was improving the engagement of older, high school-age children into the program. Another was integrating into the AM teams new staff recently hired by DOE to address the needs of homeless children. According to DOE, 100 new Community Coordinators "connect families to DHS services, case-workers and DOE shelter-based Family Assistants to enhance coordination between schools and shelters," a job description similar to that of the role of the Attendance Matters Leader. Gateway and Attendance Matters staff continue to work with DOE and providers to assist replication of aspects of the Attendance Matters program and to ensure new staff is deployed effectively.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

After months of observing and conducting fidelity assessments on the Attendance Matters pilot, the independent evaluation of the initiative is under way. To measure program outcomes, the independent evaluators from UPenn, Marist College and Rutgers University are reviewing and analyzing first-year attendance data recently delivered by DOE. They are assisted by the New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), which also collects data from multiple agencies and sources to compare against the DOE and DHS data. The independent evaluation will publish its report on the first year of the AM pilot in the Fall of 2020, with a report on the second year of the pilot following a year after that.

DISSEMINATION

The Attendance Matters initiative is now focused on disseminating what has been learned. To this end, Gateway Housing has published this implementation report, and the independent evaluation of the first year of implementation will soon be concluded. In addition, Gateway Housing and its partners will continue to present on Attendance Matters Finally, Gateway Housing will publicize the experience and lessons learned from the Attendance Matters pilot experiment in various media.

Finally, Gateway Housing worked with DOE's nonprofit contractor New Visions for Public Schools on the design of a new attendance tracking database tool, based in large part on the experience of the Attendance Matters initiative. During the design process, Gateway Housing met repeatedly with New Visions, and allowed New Visions staff to sit in on AM team meetings, to see firsthand how the AM teams read and use attendance data. Later in 2020, DOE and DHS will pilot the new tracking tool at select shelters.

REPLICATION

Equally important, in anticipation that the independent evaluation will confirm the improvements the teams are seeing in the pilot, Gateway Housing is working to facilitate the continuation and replication of the Attendance Matters program throughout the New York City DHS shelter system after the conclusion of the pilot. To this end, the New York Community Trust worked with the Attendance Matters shelter providers to develop and fund continuing efforts aimed at helping students living in shelter and their parents, to build on the initiative and to manage remote learning in response to the pandemic. Gateway Housing is also modifying the AM program model to make replication possible without the philanthropic support and additional resources that were necessary to launch the AM pilot. Gateway Housing has developed a detailed job description of the AM Leader role, in order to make it easier to assign the position's many tasks and responsibilities to other members of the AM team. As currently envisioned, this adapted AM model will require the shelter provider's Director of Social Services and Client Care Coordinators, as well as DOE Community Coordinators and Family Assistants, to take on more active leadership roles on the AM teams.

In addition to working with DHS, Gateway Housing has begun to work with providers and the New York City Administration for Children's Services to adapt the Attendance Matters program for use in Foster Care Prevention programs. This adaptation has great promise, as "educational neglect" (most often related to school absences) is a primary reason that families and their children are placed in foster care prevention.

9. CONCLUSION

Every day, the Gateway Housing Attendance Matters program pilot made a difference in the lives of homeless children and their families. In some instances, the teams quickly solved administrative issues or transportation problems, in others, they used a coordinated team approach to go beyond just getting kids to school, to address deep-seated familial and behavioral health challenges.

The experience of the Betts^d family shows how the Attendance Matters program model may start with improving attendance, but often ends up doing much more. The team meeting's data review showed how rarely Kenny and Nikola Betts attended elementary school. The shelter's case managers and the DOE Family Assistants immediately got to work arranging bus transportation and wake-up calls in the morning, but the children continued to miss more days of school than they attended. The team responded by recalibrating its strategy. The Family Assistant brought the shelter's Client Care Coordinator and the school's Bridging The Gap social worker to meet with Naomi, the children's mother. In a long, emotional meeting, the trained clinicians showed Naomi that both children were in danger of being held back a grade if she didn't do more to get them to school, not just most days, but every day. Ongoing counseling and support from the team helped her learn to manage her time better, so that laundry got done, the children got to bed earlier, and the family was up and dressed in time for the bus each morning. Since the AM team's intervention, the Betts children have not missed a day of school, and are regularly honored at the Attendance Matters celebrations at the shelter.

Experiences of families like the Betts have convinced Gateway Housing and its government and nonprofit partners that the pragmatic but relatively modest Attendance Matters intervention provides real value to homeless children who face challenges getting to school. The preliminary implementation experiences shared in this report supports the practitioners' belief, and there is optimism that the independent evaluation will confirm it.

The AM teams' work helped homeless families and children overcome transportation issues, resolve bureaucratic impediments, secure more appropriate special education services, and improve coordination between DOE and shelter providers. The teams have secured needed mental health support for parents, and helped mothers with infant children support their older children's education.

And by calling staff's attention to the importance of school attendance, and coordinating the different services, agencies and staff working on education issues for homeless families into a cohesive whole, the AM program shows promise increasing attendance rates, perhaps improving homeless children's education outcomes.

The Attendance Matters initiative has also helped to identify a number of significant systemic barriers faced by homeless children and their families, both in attending school and in negotiating challenges while residing in shelter. Policy changes by city government can realize even greater improvements in school attendance rates and other life outcomes for homeless children. The Attendance Matters interagency workgroup provides another innovation that can facilitate necessary changes to further improve school attendance rates and other education outcomes.

Gateway Housing looks forward to seeing the results of the independent evaluation of the Attendance Matters program pilot. Regardless of the results of the evaluation, AM program model components can be – and in some cases already are being – replicated by DOE and DHS providers to allow the 45,000 New York City children who live in shelter over the course of a year to achieve attendance rates that match their housed peers, and so improve their educational opportunities and life outcomes.

^d Names have been changed.

Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACE – Adverse Childhood Event

BTG – Bridging The Gap (DOE social workers serving vulnerable students)

DHS – New York City Department of Homeless Services

DOE – New York City Department of Education

DSS – New York City Department of Social Services

HRA – New York City Human Resources Administration

HUD – U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

IEP – Individual Education Program (for students with special needs)

ISAHC – Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children

LCSW – Licensed Clinical Social Worker

LMSW – Licensed Master Social Worker

MI – Motivational Interviewing

STH – Students in Temporary Housing

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Joint Hearing on Youth in Shelters
City Council Committees on Education and General Welfare
April 16, 2021

My name is Leslie Armstrong, and I am the Assistant Vice President for NYC Emergency Housing and Shelter Services at Volunteers of America-Greater New York, the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank the Chair of the City Council Committee on Education, Council Member Mark Treyger, and the Chair of the Committee on General Welfare, Council Member Stephen Levin, for the opportunity to submit my testimony.

VOA-Greater New York is an anti-poverty organization that provides services to over 11,000 people every year through emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing in NYC, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We specialize in providing housing and services to seniors, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, persons living with HIV/AIDS, and persons with behavioral health and substance use disorders.

VOA-Greater New York operates four transitional family shelters that offer on-site services for our residents, as well as three confidentially-located emergency shelters and scattered safe houses for individuals and their children who have experienced domestic violence. We provide a full range of supportive services to meet the needs of our families with the goal of helping them identify permanent housing and, for the children, we try to provide as “normal” childhood experience as possible. These supports include onsite Department of Education (DOE) Liaisons who help families with school-age children register at schools near the shelter and coordinate transportation for their children.

COVID-19 has been a disruptive and traumatic event for the 264 school-age children residing in our transitional family shelters. They have been experiencing social isolation like so many of their peers throughout NYC, but they face additional challenges because their families are also experiencing homelessness. Our children rely on daily school meals from the DOE to meet their nutritional needs, and they did not have the devices, connectivity, or physical space to easily accommodate remote learning at the onset of the pandemic. Too many still struggle with inconsistent connectivity.

VOA-Greater New York staff has been an essential resource to the residents of our transitional family shelters as they manage the impact of COVID-19 on their children. Our team has been helping parents apply for unemployment and enhanced SNAP benefits and delivering DOE school meals right to their doors each day. Our case managers have worked in partnership with DOE Liaisons to ensure our youth have devices and internet connectivity to facilitate remote learning. Upon learning that some of our youth had difficulty with remote learning in small, shared rooms with their parents and other school-age siblings, we helped them secure noise-cancelling earphones to help them concentrate on their instruction without background noise.

Despite our efforts to ensure our children have the equipment and resources they need to keep up with their learning, a number of them have received “Promotion in Doubt” letters from the DOE. According to data from the DOE from January 2021, students living in shelters had the lowest attendance rate of any student group in NYC. Given the uneven impact of COVID-19 on youth experiencing homelessness, it is paramount that the City deploy its resources to counter the learning loss that youth in shelters have experienced over the past year. A portion of the \$6 billion of federal COVID-19 relief funding that the DOE receives must be allocated toward providing youth in shelters access to the supports they need to recover academically. This includes provision of adequate transportation to summer, afterschool, tutoring,

and social-emotional support programs and bringing these services to our shelters when it is practical to do so.

VOA-Greater New York supports proposed legislation (Int. 150-2018) to require the creation of a task force regarding the transportation of students experiencing homelessness. The Mayor and the DOE have shown great commitment to youth in shelters by providing resources to ensure they have regular transportation to the school system. Notwithstanding, there are several areas of improvement that deserve careful study by the proposed task force.

Our families have experienced long waiting periods for their children to be incorporated into transportation routes. One particularly egregious case involved a differently abled youth who resides at our Regent Family Residence on the Upper West Side and relies on a wheelchair for mobility. The nearby subway station does not have a wheelchair accessible entrance, so he was unable to attend classes for six weeks due to delays in assigning him a bus route. The proposed task force must review interagency protocols to ensure transportation is provided promptly for students in shelter, with adequate accommodations for differently abled students.

We have also observed a need to increase the number of buses and routes servicing our youth. There have been cases where students are scheduled for a 5:00am pickup time to be dropped off at their school at 8:00am. Sleep deprivation resulting from the early pickup time noticeably impacted how those students performed in their classes. Our youth are often precluded from participation in after-school or summer programs because bus routes are unable to accommodate activities outside of regular school hours.

Lastly, VOA-Greater New York supports proposed legislation (Int 0139-2018) requiring the DOE to report on student health services in correlation with student housing status for students in kindergarten through grade eight. Access to disaggregated health services data will help us advocate effectively for the needs of our clients and tailor our programs to meet these needs.

On behalf of VOA-Greater New York, I would like to thank the Committees on Education and General Welfare for providing us with a platform to discuss the challenges that youth in shelters face in New York City, particularly in their interactions with the school system. We are grateful for the leadership of Chairs Treyger and Levin and look forward to partnering with you both in your advocacy for students experiencing homelessness.

Respectfully submitted by:
Volunteers of America - Greater New York
135 West 50th Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10020