

**Testimony of NYC Public Schools
Before the NYC Council Committee on Education**

June 18, 2024

Intro 118-2024 & Intro 266-2024

Testimony of Robin Davson, Executive Director of School Culture and Climate, Office of Safety and Youth Development

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Dr. Robin Davson, and I am the Executive Director of School Culture and Climate within the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD), for New York City Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Thank you also for your continued partnership in supporting our students, families, and schools as we discuss Intro No. 118, which calls for a report on schools with dress code policies, and Intro No. 266, which calls for the creation of a bullying prevention task force. The value of your critical partnership in sustaining our preventive work, especially around Restorative Justice Practices, is immeasurable. On behalf of our school communities, I thank Chair Joseph, and the members of this committee for their unwavering advocacy and support.

NYCPS is committed to ensuring that schools are places where all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported. OSYD has been deeply invested in this work and we have made significant investments and progress in this area over the years. In 2021, NYCPS issued the current Dress Code Guidelines, which set forth NYCPS policy for schools' dress codes. Dress codes are decided at the individual school level and must be consistent with these Guidelines.

The Dress Code Guidelines require that schools examine their reasoning and justification for their respective policies, and that they consider evolving generational, cultural, social, and identity norms. Under no circumstances can dress codes prohibit a student from wearing clothing consistent with their needs based on their protected identities. In addition, dress codes must be gender-neutral and cannot prohibit certain types of clothing that are stereotypically associated with one gender. Dress codes must be implemented equally and in a non-discriminatory manner. Schools have also been advised that before developing a new dress code or reexamining an existing one, they should consult with their School Leadership Team, parents, and students to ensure that different perspectives and identities are considered and respected.

For example, dress codes may not:

- Require students who identify as a specific gender from wearing attire that is stereotypically associated with a different gender (i.e., requiring only students who identify as female to wear dresses at graduation);
- Specifically prohibit miniskirts, which are predominantly worn by students who identify as female; or
- Prohibit headwear worn for religious observance, or hairstyles or hair accessories that are closely associated with protected categories.

Schools must ensure that all staff, students, and parents are advised in writing of the dress code, students' rights with respect to their attire, and consequences for students wearing clothing that violates the dress code. NYCPS has been intentional in ensuring multiple entry points of access to the Dress Code Guidelines on NYCPS webpages, i.e., [LGBTQ Supports](#) and [Guidelines on Gender](#).

Students who do not adhere to the dress code may be provided with appropriate supports, interventions, or disciplinary responses consistent with the [Citywide Behavioral Expectations to Support Student Learning](#). Supports and interventions may include adjustments such as asking the student to turn a shirt inside out, counseling support, meeting with staff, or parent notification. Instances of dress code infractions are recorded by schools and made available in our systems.

NYCPS has made many strides to ensure students can express themselves through their clothing in ways that are respectful not just to themselves, but to others. While we agree with the core intent of this bill, which we understand to be ensuring that dress codes do not perpetuate gender stereotypes and are implemented in an equitable manner, NYCPS has adopted and implements such policy through its Dress Code Guidelines. We have reservations about the extensive record-keeping and disclosure requirements in the bill when our Dress Code Guidelines already require dress codes to respect students' gender identities.

I would now like to turn to Intro No. 266. The NYCPS' Respect for All (RFA) initiative aims to prevent and address discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying. This initiative builds the capacity of staff and students to sustain an inclusive school environment where everyone feels valued, supported, and safe.

As part of RFA, all schools are required to train staff and students on bullying policies, prevention, and reporting procedures annually by October 31st. Schools are also mandated to include strategies for addressing bullying and harassment in their Consolidated Plans, and Respect for All programs into instruction and support services. These plans are reviewed annually and periodically by superintendent teams prior to certification. Additionally, schools must provide procedures for reporting bullying, including contact information at the Superintendent's office, for additional support.

Each school appoints a Respect for All liaison, who is trained centrally and serves as a resource for bullying reporting procedures, training school staff, and to whom reports can be made. OSYD also offers year-round training in Social Emotional Learning and Restorative Practices for Respect for All liaisons and for all NYCPS [staff? teachers?] to ensure they have the tools to support schools with bullying incidents.

NYCPS has taken several actions this year to prevent bullying which include:

- Facilitated refresher training for Respect for All Liaisons emphasizing biased-based discrimination.

- Partnered with external organizations to train schools in addressing bullying incidents.
- Hosted citywide retraining of all school principals and district office teams on applying the Discipline Code to address incidents appropriately while providing opportunities to educate and remediate behavior in ways that help students to grow.
- Worked with our Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) to update training for parents and guardians? with clear information on reporting pathways and expedited resolutions.

Additionally, we meet monthly with students, families, and advocates to hear their concerns and provide support. Student advisory councils meet monthly to discuss concerns with young people as well. We also leverage our NYCPS school survey results to address the perceptions and concerns of our multiple stakeholders (teachers, families, and students) on safety, trust, and bullying. We also partner with Community Based Organizations (CBO), who helped develop the RFA training for our schools. We support the intent of this bill and the commitment to create a safe environment for our students and look forward to further conversations and working with Council.

Intro. 432-2024

Testimony of George Patterson, Senior Executive Director, Community Schools, Office of Community Supports and Wellness, Division of School Leadership

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is George Patterson, and I am the Senior Executive Director for Community Schools, part of the Office of Community Supports and Wellness within the Division of School Leadership. I am happy to be here to discuss Intro. No. 432 concerning afterschool programming. From my time as a middle school principal, I deeply believe in the importance of afterschool programs and I want to emphasize that this essential work would not be possible without the leadership and dedication of our partner agency, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Together, we recognize the powerful impact that afterschool academic and enrichment programming can have on our students, especially our most socially vulnerable student populations.

Before I discuss the proposed legislation, I wanted to provide a landscape of what afterschool looks like today across NYC Public Schools. We provided a similar update at this time last year. There are three main types of afterschool programming options available to our students and families: DYCD-funded programs, which make up the largest number of programs in our schools, NYCPS-funded programs, and individual programs run between schools and CBOs. Our CBO partners offer a variety of targeted services to our schools, and tailor supports based on school and community needs. These services can range from instructional support to enrichment activities that can have physical/recreational components. A look at our current data shows:

- 956 schools with at least one centrally funded afterschool program. 580 of the 956 serve middle and high school students.
- 654 schools, 351 of which serve middle and high school students, that do not have a centrally funded afterschool program.

Turning to Intro. 432, which would require New York City Public Schools serving middle and high school students to provide families with information on afterschool programs in their schools. NYC Public Schools supports the intent of the bill. Currently, information about afterschool programs is communicated to families through school websites, the DYCD website (discoverdycd.dycdconnect.nyc), and the Community Connect hotline. We look forward to working with the Council on providing guidance to schools for sharing this information more consistently with families. I thank you again for your time today.

Intro 399-2024 & 577-2024

Testimony of John Shea, Chief Executive Officer, Division of School Facilities

Thank you for allowing me to address this Committee today regarding the proposed bill requiring NYC agencies to conduct green roof feasibility studies. My name is John Shea, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Division of School Facilities at the NYC Public Schools. We at NYC Public Schools are deeply committed to advancing environmentally sustainable practices within our educational system, and we share in the enthusiasm for the benefits that green roofs offer to our buildings, school communities, and the environment. However, I express reservations regarding the feasibility of this bill, and we do not support it in its current form.

The lack of clarity regarding the definition for a green roof presents a significant challenge. We've observed a wide spectrum of green roof implementations across our schools, ranging from comprehensive installations like the one at P.S. 041 in Manhattan, funded by RESO-A and PTA dollars, to smaller-scale green roof projects mandated through Local Law 92/94 of 2019. Without clear guidelines, determining which structures qualify as green roofs would be ambiguous and problematic for compliance with the bill. Additionally, the establishment of a means to fund the operations of these green roofs is paramount. Without proper maintenance, the sustainability and effectiveness of these installations will lead to safety liabilities and the need for unnecessary capital expenditures.

It is essential to recognize that while green roofs hold promise as a sustainable infrastructure solution, our office is currently engaged in other initiatives that are ready for implementation immediately. For instance, in partnership with DCAS, our solar photovoltaics (PV) program has made significant strides in installing rooftop solar PV systems across our school buildings.

Currently we have successfully completed 90 installations with a total electrical capacity of 19.7 MW, constituting 80% of all the solar electrical capacity on all City-owned buildings. This program not only reduces our carbon footprint but also contributes to our long-term energy independence and resilience.

In conclusion, while we applaud the intent behind the proposed bill and remain enthusiastic about the potential of green roofs, we suggest the need to work with the committee on the language of the bill to ensure its feasibility. We stand ready to collaborate and contribute our expertise towards the development of more viable and effective sustainability initiatives for the benefit of our schools and the broader NYC community.

I'd like to now turn to Intro 399, which would require NYCPS to report annually on the degree to which indoor and outdoor facilities comply with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). NYCPS is committed to ensuring that its programs, services, and activities are accessible to staff, members of the school community, and family members with disabilities. As part of Local Law 12 of 2023, we have posted our five-year accessibility plan on our website. The accessibility plan details the role of our Accessibility Sub-Committee, in partnership with School Construction Authority, to discuss strategic planning on all issues regarding accessibility within school buildings. The plan also includes details for improving digital content to ensure accessibility standards are met. Accessibility is not seen as a legislated mandate for compliance for our agency, but as a basic human right.

The five-year capital plan for FY 2025-29 increased funding levels for accessibility, allocating \$800 million towards making our buildings accessible for our school communities, an increase of \$50 million from the previous FY 2020-24 Capital Plan. That plan, with our continued focus on citywide equity, funded 56 accessibility projects in historically underserved districts. We are grateful for the support and advocacy of our partners to accomplish this important work for our students and families.

As we only received the bill recently, we are still reviewing, and we look forward to engaging with Council.

Intro 733-2024

Testimony of Adam Breier, Deputy Executive Director of Career and Technical Education, Office of Student Pathways

Good afternoon, my name is Adam Breier and I am the Deputy Executive Director of Career and Technical Education in the Office of Student Pathways. Career Connected Learning is a top priority for the Chancellor and sits at the center of his bold vision to reimagine the student experience so that every NYC public school student graduates on a path to a rewarding career

aligned with their passion and purpose and offering long-term economic security and a choice-filled life. Strengthening and equitably growing market-aligned high-quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) is a core element of this strategy.

The NYC Public Schools' career-connected learning portfolio, led by The Office of Student Pathways (OSP), supports and oversees a portfolio of over 296 CTE programs operating in over 130 schools. This includes 46 CTE-dedicated schools and 85 comprehensive schools with CTE programs, including the Brooklyn Navy Yard STEAM Center. CTE presently serves over 60,000 students across the five boroughs. We would like to recognize the leadership of this council and thank you for your continuous collaboration and dedicated support.

The proposed legislation—Intro. No. 733—will revive and amend the sunset Local Law 174 requiring the NYC Public Schools to report on the Career and Technical Education programs in New York City public schools. This legislation will provide greater transparency through new data reporting requirements that will serve to inform NYC Public Schools, school communities, elected officials, and stakeholders. We are in support of this legislation and look forward to working with City Council to ensure that the reporting requirements named in this bill align to high-quality CTE program implementation and, to the extent possible, what we track in our data systems.

Intro 771-2024

Testimony of Kleber Palma, Executive Director, Office of Language Access, Division of Family Engagement and External Affairs

Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Kleber Palma, and I am the Executive Director for the New York City Public Schools' Office of Language Access (OLA). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Intro. 771 regarding the distribution of information on NYC Public Schools' over-the-phone interpretation services.

NYC Public Schools is committed to ensuring that school staff and families are aware of and have access to all available language assistance services. To that end, we take various steps every year to support our school staff and families. To begin, school staff receive information about the available language assistance services via the Language Access Kit, which schools receive every September. This kit includes several language access resources, including the telephone number to access over-the-phone interpretation and multilingual signage for schools to post at public entrances.

School staff are also notified about how and when to access the phone service via electronic communications throughout the year, such as the P-Digest, OLA's monthly newsletter for schools, and periodic email blasts to school-based Language Access Coordinators. School staff also receive information during language access training sessions, which cover best practices for

using the over-the-phone service. Additionally, staff can refer to OLA's internal online page for details on accessing the service. Lastly, the over-the-phone interpretation service is also available to the agents behind our Parent Support Line, 718-935-2009, to access when a language need is identified.

Families receive information in the NYC Public Schools' nine covered languages on the available language assistance services on the NYC Public Schools website, during public awareness campaigns, at parent events throughout the City, via an e-campaign (which includes emails, texts, and robocalls to families), on an annual mailed postcard to households, and at schools that make use of the signage available within the Language Access Kit or other OLA-provided resources, such as a language access display or brochure for families.

In closing, we support the goals of this legislation and look forward to working with the Council to ensure access to this valuable service is accessible to all. Thank you.

Intro 797-2024

Testimony of Elaine Lindsey, Chief of High School Support, Division of School Leadership

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Elaine Lindsey, and I am the Chief of School Support for High Schools for New York City Public Schools. I am here to express my support for Intro No. 797, which aims to enhance transparency and accountability regarding student clubs and organization in our public schools.

Student clubs and organizations play a vital role in the holistic development of our students, offering them opportunities to explore interests, develop leadership skills, and build community. Currently, principals collect information and verify this information through a survey, which is then publicly displayed on [myschools.nyc](https://myschools.nyc.gov), our school search tool. By formalizing this process and requiring annual reports, Int. No. 797 ensures that we can monitor and support these essential extracurricular activities effectively. This transparency will help identify schools that may lack these opportunities and direct resources to ensure that all students have access to a diverse range of activities.

Moreover, including details such as the type of faculty advisor and authorization for off-campus activities provides valuable insights into these clubs' operational aspects. This information can help in assessing the adequacy of support provided to these student groups and ensure compliance with relevant regulations while safeguarding student privacy and safety. I fully support Int. No. 797, thank you for your consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Respect for All Family Resource



NYC Public Schools is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all students. Bullying or harassment of any kind is NEVER acceptable, and such actions are subject to the NYC Public Schools Discipline Code: schools.nyc.gov/DisciplineCode.

As we work together to prevent discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying, it is important to understand what these actions might look like, so that you can recognize the signs of them. These behaviors can be done to humiliate a person based on their race, color, ethnicity, religion, creed, national origin, age, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, citizenship/immigration status, weight, or disability, and they usually fall under at least one of four categories:

- **Physical:** involves physical injury or threat of harm or injury such as violence and stalking
- **Verbal:** using disrespectful and insulting language towards someone such as making mean-spirited jokes or name calling; intentionally using a wrong pronoun or pronunciation of a name
- **Social:** peer rejection or exclusion to humiliate or isolate a person, including taunting; attempting to pressure or force a person to do something (hazing)
- **Written:** demeaning text or imagery written or printed to ridicule a person; also includes electronic communications (cyber-bullying) using technology such as cell phone messages, email, social media, blogs, chat rooms, and gaming systems

If you have observed signs that your child may be exhibiting these behaviors towards others, or that they might be a target of bullying at school, there are resources available to help.

Once a report is made, parents/guardians must be notified no later than two (2) school days following receipt of the report. Parents may request support for their child before, while, or after the school investigates the complaint.

At the conclusion of the investigation, parents will be informed of the outcome within ten (10) school days. If needed, the child may be referred for support services.

Retaliation against someone who reports an incident of harassment, bullying, intimidation, or discriminatory behavior, or who helps in an investigation, is prohibited. Students who believe they have been retaliated against should immediately contact a school administrator.

Students and families can report bullying and harassment concerns by:

- Submitting a complaint in any language online at nycenet.edu/bullyingreporting or via your NYC Schools Account (NYCSA) at schoolsaccount.nyc



- Calling the NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) help line, Monday through Friday, 8AM–6PM at 718-935-2288
- Emailing the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) at RespectforAll@schools.nyc.gov
- Telling a staff member at the school or contacting the school's Respect for All liaison
- If your issue involves sexual or gender-based harassment, contact our Title IX coordinator at 718-935-4987 or Title_IX_Inquiries@schools.nyc.gov

Respect for All Liaison

Your school has a dedicated Respect for All Liaison and a Sexual Harassment Prevention Liaison to assist students and families being affected by bullying or harassment. You can find their names in the “School Contacts and Information” section of your school’s listing page at schoolsearch.schools.nyc. Their names can also be found on posters displayed around school.

Free Mental Health Support

NYC 988 offers free, confidential, mental health support to New Yorkers of all ages. Speak to a counselor via phone, text, or chat and get access to mental health and substance use services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Counselors can provide:

- Immediate support for problems like stress, depression, anxiety, or drug and alcohol use
- Crisis counseling and suicide prevention counseling
- Connection to Peer Specialists, who have personal experience with mental health or substance use challenges
- Support for LGBTQI+ Youth and Young Adults

New Yorkers can reach out to NYC 988 on behalf of themselves or someone else. Young people can call on behalf of their parents or caregivers, and anyone can call NYC 988 on behalf of a child. Support is available for people of all ages and in over 200 languages.

- **Call or Text: 988**
 - Español: 988, Aprete 2
 - Deaf or Hard of Hearing? Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988. NYC 988 Counselors are trained to accept calls from deaf and hard of hearing individuals using video relay services.
 - Veteran’s Crisis Line: Dial 988, press 1
 - LGBTQI+ Youth & Young Adults: Dial 988, press 3
- **Chat Now:** at 988lifeline.org/chat
- **Find Services:** nyc.gov/988

NYC Teenspace: all teens 13–17 living in New York City now have access to free mental health support through NYC Teenspace, a new program from the NYC Department Health and Mental Hygiene Department (DOHMH) offering online counseling services and more. Learn more at talkspace.com/nyc.

United Federation of Teachers BRAVE Hotline: BRAVE – Building Respect, Acceptance, and Voice through Education – provides educators, parents, and students with the tools, knowledge, and support to be pro-active in confronting and stopping bullying. Students can access free mental health support by contacting the BRAVE hotline by phone, text, or online chat.

- **Call** 212-709-3222, Monday–Friday, 2:30–9:30PM
- **Text** 43961
- **Chat online** at UFT.org/BRAVEchat



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
JUNE 18, 2024**

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the members of the Committee on Education for holding this important hearing.

In August of last year, Advocates for Children found that only 31.1 percent of NYC schools are fully accessible for people with disabilities.¹ The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments ensure people with disabilities have equal access to public programs and services, including public education. However, many students with disabilities are barred from attending their neighborhood schools because of inaccessible infrastructure. This not only means that these students are unable to fully access their communities but that they must travel to an accessible school, which may mean hours on a bus every day, cutting into their learning time. Students are also prohibited from participating in after-school programs, unless there is someone to provide transportation home after, because the school buses will not bring them home. This lack of accessibility also means that students' family and community members with accessibility needs are unable to attend events and meetings at these schools.

Advocates for Children has called for \$1.25 billion to be allocated for improving school accessibility to bring another 150 to 200 school buildings to full accessibility by 2029. However, in the proposed FY25 budget, the School Construction Authority has only designated \$800 million for improving accessibility. Every year that we do not meaningfully prioritize making school buildings accessible is another year that students cannot attend the schools of their choice, or spend valuable instructional time traveling to a school that can accommodate them.

Today, we are hearing my bill, Intro 399, which would require the Department of Education to report annually on the degree to which indoor and outdoor school facilities comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, this bill would make public the contact information for each school's ADA coordinator, the protocol for requesting an accommodation, and information regarding the extent to which zoned schools have the capacity to accommodate students and employees with disabilities. It has been more than thirty years since the ADA was

¹ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0cd31f41c8224f68a91b913b733bf46d>

signed into law, yet New Yorkers with disabilities are still barred from entering and attending many of our schools.

Thank you.



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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

Re: Int. 0266-2024 (establishing a bullying prevention task force), Int. 0399-2024 (requiring reporting on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act), Int. 0733-2024 (requiring reporting on Career and Technical Education), and Int. 0771-2024 (requiring distribution of information on interpretation services)

June 18, 2024

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sarah Part, and I am the Senior Policy Analyst at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 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 speak out for students whose needs are often overlooked, including students with disabilities, students from immigrant families, students with mental health needs, students involved in bullying, and students who are homeless or in foster care.

I am here to testify about four of the bills on today's agenda—Intro. 266, establishing a bullying prevention task force; Intro. 399, requiring reporting on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; Intro. 733, requiring reporting on Career and Technical Education; and Intro. 771, requiring distribution of information on interpretation services.

Int. No. 0266-2024

AFC hears from many families of students who have experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination at school, and we support Intro. 266, which would require the creation of a bullying prevention task force. To further strengthen Intro. 266, we suggest:

- Amending section (1)(b) of the bill to add New York City students and parents with lived experience of bullying as members of the task force.
- Adding to the list of factors in (1)(h):
6. Research on evidence-based approaches for preventing and addressing bullying, including approaches that do not rely on exclusionary discipline or law enforcement; and
7. Strategies that meet of the needs of students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, and other populations disproportionately impacted by bullying and harassment.



We also urge the City to include \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum and an additional \$6 million (beyond the \$6M partial restoration already announced) for restorative justice practices in the final Fiscal Year 2025 budget. Both initiatives play an important role in creating positive school climates, preventing and addressing bullying, and supporting students' social-emotional needs, but the Mental Health Continuum is supported by one-year city funding set to expire later this month, while restorative practices will see a reduction in funding due to the expiration of federal stimulus dollars.

Int. No. 0399-2024

We appreciate the attention that the Council, the Public Advocate, and the Comptroller have given to school accessibility and agree with the underlying goal of Intro. 399, which would require annual reporting on New York City Public Schools (NYCPS)'s compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As AFC detailed in a [report](#) last year, two-thirds of New York City schools are still not fully accessible to students, parents, and educators with physical disabilities. Until the day the City reaches full ADA compliance, transparency about the accessibility status of individual school buildings is crucial, and we would be happy to partner to strengthen Intro. 399 and build on the information NYCPS already provides about the accessibility of school buildings via the Building Accessibility Profiles (BAPs). More immediately, the most important step the Council can take to ensure the ADA has real meaning in the lives of New Yorkers with disabilities is to ensure the 2025–2029 Capital Plan allocates an additional \$450 million—for a total investment of \$1.25 billion—for school accessibility projects.

Int. No. 0733-2024

AFC supports Intro. 733, which would require annual reporting on Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in New York City schools. Local Law 174 of 2016, which contained many similar provisions but sunset after five years, provided valuable data on access to CTE. English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities have historically been under-represented in the City's CTE programs. At a time when NYCPS is expanding career-connected learning, public data reporting could help advocates, families, and the public hold the City accountable for eliminating barriers and ensuring *all* students have equitable access to CTE.

We have several recommendations for amending Intro. 733 to help make the data as useful as possible. Our suggestions include:

- Revising section (b)(7) to require cohort-based reporting on the number of students who enrolled in CTE programs, completed the full sequence of CTE courses, and completed and passed a technical assessment. Such information will make data on the number of *graduates* who completed CTE programs more meaningful and help shed light on the nature of disparities.
- Amending section (c) to add eligibility for the free and reduced-price lunch program, status as a student in temporary housing, and status as a student in foster care to the list of factors by which data must be disaggregated.

We are including our suggested revisions at the end of this testimony.



Int. No. 0771-2024

AFC supports Intro. 771, which would require NYCPS to distribute information on interpretation services. More than 40% of New York City students speak a language other than English at home, but too often, parents who have limited English proficiency do not receive the interpretation and translation services they need to participate in their children's education. For example, AFC frequently works with families of students with disabilities who have never received critical documents—such as their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)—in a language they can understand. Parents need to know that phone interpretation is available in a wide range of languages, and such information would be especially beneficial to parents whose primary language is not one of the top nine into which NYCPS routinely translates written documents.

To those ends, we recommend the Council amend Intro. 771 to:

- Clarify in section (b) that NYCPS must provide information on translation services, as well as phone interpretation services:
 1. *A list of ~~phone~~-interpretation and translation services offered by the department;*
- Add participation in the special education process as one of the examples of when translation and interpretation services might be used:
 3. *Examples of how such services may be used, included, but not limited to, helping parents communicate with school staff and helping parents participate in the special education process; and*
- Add specificity in section (c) regarding the languages other than English into which the information about the availability of interpretation services should be made available. We suggest:
 - c. *Such materials shall be made available in English and in the 25 most common home additional-languages of students enrolled in the city school district of the city of New York as determined by the department.*

In addition to moving Intro. 771 forward, we urge the Council to ensure the final FY 2025 budget includes \$4 million for the immigrant family communications and outreach initiative, which is currently supported by expiring one-year city funding.

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

Int. No. 733

By Council Members Stevens, Gennaro, Riley, Nurse, Gutiérrez, Narcisse, De La Rosa, Louis, Farías, Salaam, Joseph, Schulman, Restler and Cabán

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the New York City Department of Education to report information on Career and Technical Education programs in New York City public schools

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

1 Section 1. Title 21-A of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by
2 adding a new chapter 9 to read as follows:

3 Chapter 9. Career and Technical Education Reporting

4 §21-971 Reporting on career and technical education.

5 a. Definitions. As used in this chapter, the following terms have the following meanings:

6 Career and technical education. The term “career and technical education” or “CTE” means
7 a curriculum designed to provide students with certain skills that will enable them to pursue a
8 career in certain disciplines, including but not limited to agricultural education, business and
9 marketing, family and consumer sciences, health occupations, technology and trade, or technical
10 and industrial education.

11 Certified instructor. The term “certified instructor” means a teacher who has earned a
12 teaching license in a specific career and technical education subject.

13 Student. The term “student” means any pupil under the age of twenty-one as of the
14 September 1 of the academic period being reported, who does not have a high school diploma and
15 who is enrolled in a school of the city school district of the city of New York, not including a pre-
16 kindergarten student or a preschool child as preschool child is defined in section 4410 of the
17 education law.

1 b. No later than April 30, ~~2024~~2025, and annually by April 30 thereafter, the department
2 shall submit to the mayor and council and post conspicuously on the department's website, a report
3 for the preceding academic year which shall include, but not be limited to the following:

4 1. The total number of high school-level CTE programs in schools of the city school district
5 of the city of New York, including for each (i) the name of the program; (ii) the field, discipline
6 or industry for which the program prepares students; (iii) an outline of the skills students develop
7 in the program; (iv) the number of courses in the program; (v) the name and number of industry
8 partners associated with the program; (vi) the ~~high~~-school at which the program is located; (vii)
9 whether the ~~high~~-school is a CTE-designated high school; (viii) whether the CTE program has
10 received approval through the New York state department of education's CTE approval process;
11 (ix) the grade levels served by the program; (x) the number of students enrolled in the program;
12 and (xi) the number of students registered as being in attendance for the program, for each course
13 component that requires attendance, irrespective of whether that attendance is in person or remote.

14 2. For each school offering at least one CTE program, the number and percentage of ~~age-~~
15 or grade-eligible students ~~at each high school~~enrolled in any such CTE-program;

16 3. The number and percentage of students in a CTE program who engaged in a related (i)
17 un-paid internship; (ii) paid internship;

18 4. The number and percentage of applicants who listed a CTE-designated high school as
19 their first choice in the high school application process during the previous application year;

20 5. The number and percentage of applicants who listed a CTE-designated high school as
21 their second choice in the high school application process during the previous application year;

22 6. The number and percentage of applicants who participated in the high school application
23 process who enrolled in a CTE-designated high school;

1 7. ~~To the extent such information is available, the number and percentage of graduates from~~
2 ~~the~~For the cohort of students who entered ninth grade four years prior to the academic period being
3 reported and the cohort who entered ninth grade six years prior to the academic period being
4 reported, the number and percentage of students who (i) enrolled in ~~completed~~ a CTE program;;
5 ~~and having~~ (ii) completed the full sequence of courses for such program;; (iii) completed a
6 technical assessment; (iv) passed all components of the technical assessment; (v) received a high
7 school diploma; (vi) received industry credentials; (vii) obtained employment in a related field
8 within six months of graduation; (viii) enrolled in a two- or four-year college within six months of
9 graduation; and (ix) enrolled in a vocational program within six months of graduation; ~~obtained~~
10 ~~one or both of the following (i) industry certification; (ii) employment;~~

11 8. ~~The 4-year graduation rate for CTE-designated high schools;~~

12 9. ~~The 6-year graduation rate for CTE-designated high schools;~~

13 108. The number of designated full-time and part-time certified instructors providing
14 instruction at each ~~high~~-school with a CTE program; and for each CTE-designated high school,
15 the ratio of full-time certified instructors to students at such school; and

16 119. The number of staff in each school or program who received professional
17 development or training administered by the department and relating to CTE as of the prior school
18 year.

19 c. The data required to be reported pursuant to paragraphs two through ~~eleven~~-seven of
20 subdivision b of this section shall be disaggregated by (i) race-~~or~~/ethnicity; (ii) gender; (iii) special
21 education status; (iv) English language learner status; (v) eligibility for the free and reduced price
22 lunch program; (vi) status as a student in temporary housing; (vii) status as a student in foster care;
23 and (viii) community school district.

1 d. No information that is otherwise required to be reported pursuant to this section shall be
2 reported in a manner that would violate any applicable provision of federal, state or local law
3 relating to the privacy of student information or that would interfere with law enforcement
4 investigations or otherwise conflict with the interests of law enforcement. If a category contains
5 between 1 and 5 students, or contains an amount that would allow the amount of another category
6 that is 5 or less to be deduced, the number shall be replaced with a symbol. A category that contains
7 zero shall be reported as 0, unless such reporting would violate any applicable provision of federal,
8 state or local law relating to the privacy of student information.

9 § 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

MH
LS #12670
05/01/2023



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education

June 18, 2024

Thank you, Chair Joseph and the Committee on Education for holding this hearing and giving the Asian American Federation (AAF) the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Layla Hay, policy and advocacy intern at AAF, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

We are here today to discuss **legislative reforms regarding inclusivity in the New York City school system**. I would like to thank City Council for introducing measures that aim to improve the experiences of students and promote inclusion and diversity, including developing a curriculum on religious diversity.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the NYC Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (NYC OPHC) received over 660 complaints regarding hate crimes in 2023, with a significant portion motivated by anti-religious bias. According to AAF research, there were 251 anti-Asian specific hate crimes reported to the NYPD from January 2020 to March 2023— this is only a fraction of actual incidents, as anti-Asian hate crimes—alongside those targeting other marginalized groups—are vastly underreported.

In 2021, AAF launched the Hope Against Hate campaign to create a community-based and community-informed safety network to address the surge in anti-Asian hate violence. Based on a survey of 400 residents, 36% of respondents believed that *ethnic studies* and *cross-cultural events* would be most effective in preventing anti-Asian bias incidents. We can see that education is crucial in preventing discrimination on the basis of *all backgrounds*, recognizing that interaction and being in community with people from diverse backgrounds is critical to fostering safety and tolerance in the melting pot that is New York City.

Furthermore, through our Hope Against Hate outreach with youth, our research team and data center reported that we reached **6,900 youth** through community education, anti-bullying initiatives, and emotional and mental health support services. Through this work, we identified the vital role that education plays in combating stereotypes and discrimination and creating an inclusive environment for youth of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. As a city that touts the values of progress and inclusivity, we should ensure that the institutions educating our future generation reflect and recognize the identities of those they serve.

Resolution 0095 introduced by Councilmember Hanif calls upon the New York City Department of Education to work with faith-based organizations to develop and implement a curriculum that embraces religious diversity across all grade levels, mandates professional development focused on religious diversity, and enforce accurate classification and reporting of hate crimes in schools. If passed, this resolution will address student bullying and religious discrimination while fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students, supporting their First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

The City must recognize and protect all who live, work, and worship here. This educational initiative is not merely about curriculum development; it's about fundamentally shaping the minds and hearts of our young generations and educators to see differences, commonalities, and shared human values, thus preventing our city and schools from becoming a vehicle for hate. A curriculum on religious diversity will

have widespread benefits for our city's future generation, including many of the Asian Americans that we represent. The Department of Education must support youth as they practice their faith, express their identities, and grow into engaged citizens—free from the fear of discrimination and hate crimes. By supporting this legislation, we are taking concrete steps to create a safer city, one in which all communities can thrive, and are demonstrating that hate has no place in New York City.

At the Asian American Federation, we thank you for allowing us to testify on this critical subject. We are grateful to see City Council move ahead with policies that protect and raise awareness about our communities. We look forward to continuing this work with all of you.



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Testimony on ADA Compliance, an Anti-Bullying Task Force, and on Reporting and Disseminating Education Information

June 21, 2024

To the Committee on Education:

My name is Molly Senack, and I work at the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer.

Students with disabilities in the New York City public school system face a multitude of interconnected barriers: both curricula and physical school buildings can be inaccessible, a backlog in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) has resulted in some students having to wait years to receive legally mandated accommodations and related services (a 2023 report from the office of the New York City comptroller found that during the 2021-2022 school year 13,800 related services- e.g., speech therapy, physical therapy, etc.- were not fulfilled), and staffing shortages of paraprofessionals, guidance counselors, and social workers limit access to mental health services and certain clubs and programs that require the presence of an additional professional (the national guidance says the ratio for both guidance counselors and social workers should be 1:250, or 1:50 if the students present with higher needs; the average in NYC public schools is one social worker for every 456 students and one guidance counselor for every 277 students). These are just a few examples of the barriers that contribute to students with disabilities being twice as likely to drop out of high school as their nondisabled peers (10.7% vs 4.7%, according to a 2021 National Center for Education Statistics report).

The Council is now considering legislation that will actively address many of these barriers:

- **Int 0399-2024**, which will require the DOE to provide information about schools' compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- **Int 0432-2024**, which will improve the distribution of information about after-school programs.
- **Int 0797-2024**, which will require better reporting from the DOE on student clubs and organizations.
- **Int 0771-2024**, which will improve the distribution of information related to phone interpretation services.
- **Int 0266-2024**, which will establish a bullying prevention task force.

The impact of **Int 0399** is the most direct: it will require the DOE to report on ADA compliance in schools, on accommodation requests, on digital access, and on bus travel times for students with disabilities who do not live in a district with an accessible school. According to the 2023 Advocates for Children (AFC) Report, *Access Denied*, less than one third of public schools in NYC are considered fully accessible. That means that roughly 69% of NYC public schools are exclusionary to students with certain disabilities, who are then severely limited in their school choice and can be

denied access to programs that are not offered in the schools they are able to attend. And for the approximately 43% of NYC yellow school bus riders who have a disability, the lack of accessible schools can mean enduring bus rides that exceed the legal time limit of 115 minutes, since there is no guarantee there will be an accessible school close to their homes.

However, the impact of this shortage of accessible schools is not limited to students: it also affects the manner in which parents and family members with disabilities can participate in the education process, and it prevents people with certain disabilities from being hired at two-thirds of the public schools in the city, at a time when NYCPS is reporting significant staffing shortages. The information obtained through this legislation will indicate how, and if, progress is being made to address these issues.

This legislation will also provide parents with information about the accommodation process: how to request accommodations, and how to appeal a previous request that has been denied. For many parents, navigating this process is difficult, and providing more accessible information not only alleviates a burden, it helps ensure parents are fully aware of their options.

This is why **Ints 0432, 0797, and 0771** are also crucial for improving the quality of education for students with disabilities. **Int 0771** will alert more parents about additional options for language interpretation services, at a time when enrollment for English Language Learners and the children of families seeking asylum is increasing, and when multiple meetings of the Citywide Councils for District 75 and Special Education over the last school year have touched on concerns from parents that their children's IEP meetings are inaccessible due to language barriers.

Int 0797 will require the DOE to report on the number of paraprofessionals present during after school clubs and programs. The state comptroller's office reported that between June 2020 and November 2021, the number of paraprofessionals working in city schools dropped by approximately 15%. When questioned about current numbers at the hearing on this bill, the NYCDOE was unable to provide them. Without current numbers, it is impossible to know whether initiatives to address the shortage have been working.

According to multiple interviews published in *Chalkbeat*, one of the main reasons parents don't enroll their children in after-school programs that provide services that are inaccessible during the school day is a lack of information: parents may or may not know about the existence of programs designed to provide students with disabilities additional services, and when they do know, having access to information necessary for attendance- about transportation, location, staffing, and general availability- is not guaranteed. **Int 0432** will address this, and will make enrollment in these programs more accessible.

Int 0266 also centers the collection of data: of trends in reported incidents of bullying, of current guidelines and procedures for reporting and responding to these incidents, of interagency coordination and cooperation with regards to bullying prevention. This information will not only provide insight into how students with disabilities are impacted by bullying (and how intersectionality might compound this impact), it will also provide insight into how effective current methods are at combatting and addressing these issues, and whether adjustments need to be made. By specifying that mental health experts are to be an integral part of the task force, this legislation also ensures that mental healthcare remains at the center of discussions about bullying, and helps to standardize

the practice of having available mental health resources in schools, at a time when funding for many of those resources is at risk.

Things that remain under-studied by extension tend to remain under-addressed. The legislation under consideration focuses on gathering and disseminating information that is crucial for improving the lives of students with disabilities because, simply put, transparency is an invaluable first step towards equity.

We thank the Council for their time and effort, and ask for their support in passing these bills.

Sincerely,

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

**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti, Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Submitted to New York City Council Committee on Education Hearing
June 18th, 2024**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring 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; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure the wellbeing of New York's children, families, and communities.

We thank Chair Joseph and all the Committee on Education members for holding today's hearing on legislation impacting the wellbeing of students in the New York City Public Schools System. This testimony focuses on Int 0432-2024, related to information about afterschool programs, as well as Int 0118 and Res 0292, related to school dress codes.

Increasing Access to Afterschool

CCC supports Int 0432-2024 by Councilmember Sanchez, which would require the Department of Education to provide information about after-school programs to students.

Afterschool is an essential service for young people, offering spaces where children and youth can learn and engage in a variety of impactful programming. We agree that more work must be done to ensure students are aware of these opportunities. Unfortunately, the projected cuts to critical afterschool programs in the Administrations proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Budget would negatively impact the goals of this bill.

The scope of afterschool and youth services cuts facing New York City in the budget is staggering, with a proposed \$6.9 million cut to COMPASS afterschool. This cut will result in a loss of over 3,500 seats for youth, preventing them from accessing community and positive youth development experiences. Access to free and affordable afterschool services has never been more important for New York families. Citywide, 80% of families cannot afford after school for their children, and across the city families pay up to 63% of their annual income on child caring services, including afterschool. It is urgent that our city leaders protect these supports that are critical to the immediate and long-term wellbeing of New York city's children and families.

Our City must also address the operational issues plaguing the youth services system. Therefore, in addition to restoring funding and passing Int 0432-2024, we join our partners in the Campaign for Children (C4C) in urging the city to implement the following recommendations to address operational challenges:

- Increase the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of no less than \$22/hour for staff and ensure year-round contracting.

- Prioritize consumer-centered outreach and enrollment, including by enabling CBOs providing youth services to directly enroll children and youth onsite, and by taking immediate action to stand up community-rooted application and enrollment facilitators that prioritize expediting access to youth services (afterschool and summer programming) in partnership with CBOs
- Establish year-round, 12-month youth services and shift to a K-8 summer program model
- Pay youth service providers on time and catch up on payments owed
- Fully staff DYCD divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and make permanent the ability of youth service providers to batch multiple months of invoices.
- Release a new RFP for the SONYC and COMPASS contracts that covers the full and actual cost of care.

By restoring the cuts and addressing the current operational shortcomings, we can build a stronger youth services system and ensure all young people who need services are able to receive them.

Supporting An Equitable Dress Code in NYC Schools

Education disparity continues to impact students in the New York Public Schools System. Suspensions have risen to almost pre-pandemic levels, with a 13% spike in the 2022-2023 school year compared to the previous year.ⁱ Furthermore, suspensions disproportionately target Black and Brown students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities. Even though Black students compose 21% of the student body, they received 40% of all suspensions in the 2022-2023 year. Similarly, 38% of suspensions were given to students with disabilities, who only comprise about 22% of all students.ⁱⁱ

Research by Girls for Gender Equity has shown that certain dress codes can lead to an increase of suspensions of students and can disproportionately impact Black girls and gender expansive youth of color who may experience greater policing of their clothing choices and punished for how they show up at school.ⁱⁱⁱ **CCC, in tandem with our partners, therefore, supports Int. 0118 which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report on dress code policies in DOE schools.** This reporting bill would include information about whether schools have dress code policies, what those policies contain (including disciplinary provisions), whether those dress codes are posted to school websites, and information on dress code disciplinary violations.

Implementing a reporting system would create a crucial framework of accountability for schools, ensuring adherence to dress code policy guidelines. This bill would mandate that schools make their dress code policies widely available, keeping students and parents well-informed. Moreover, it should track patterns of disproportionate and biased enforcement, thereby addressing and mitigating any inequities in policy application. We believe this is an essential change to build equity and support in students.

Similarly, CCC also supports Res 0292 sponsored by Councilmember Stevens. This resolution would require the Department of Education to create an inclusive school dress code policy that complies with Title IX of the Federal Education Amendments Act and accounts for diverse cultures,

gender expressions and body diversity. This would allow for the inclusivity of cultures, gender expressions, sexual orientation and body diversity is overdue to be reflected in the education policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

ⁱ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/01/08/nyc-school-suspensions-spike-to-pre-pandemic-levels/#:~:text=Schools%20issued%2028%2C412%20suspensions%20during,the%20wake%20of%20the%20pandemic.>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/01/08/nyc-school-suspensions-spike-to-pre-pandemic-levels/#:~:text=Schools%20issued%2028%2C412%20suspensions%20during,the%20wake%20of%20the%20pandemic.>

ⁱⁱⁱ Girls for Gender Equity. (2021) Suspending Self Expression Part II. PDF.

Comments by Teresa Arboleda
President, Citywide Council on English Language Learners (CCELL)
(For identification purposes only)
New York City Council *Committee on Education* hearing
Tuesday, June 18th at 1:00 PM, Council Chambers at City Hall, New York, New York 0007
and via **Zoom web conference**, on the following legislation:
[Int. No. 771 \(Lee\)](#), a Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York,
in relation to requiring distribution of information regarding phone interpretation services

Thank you for holding this hearing and for adding this bill to the already existing § 21-191 language assistance services of the NYC administrative code, which states:

*a. The agency and all agency contractors shall provide free **language** assistance services as required by this chapter to limited **English** proficient individuals.*

*b. When a limited **English** proficient individual seeks or receives benefits or services from an agency office or agency contractor, the agency office or agency contractor shall provide prompt **language** assistance services in all interactions with that individual, whether the interaction is by **telephone or in person**.*

My concern is that the already existing code mentions interaction by **telephone or in person**, so why does only the telephone portion of the code require a new bill. I believe that the bill should also include distribution of information about provision of language services regarding interactions in person. When I first read the bill my first impulse was to question why only telephone interpretation services were addressed. Omitting the in-person information may confuse the population we are trying to reach into thinking that only phone interpretation is available. It is important that there be complete information about language services in the bill.

Thank you and please contact me at arboledat@yahoo.com or at 917-488-3221 if you have any questions or concerns.



**The New York City Council
Committee on Education
Testimony Submission from Legal Services NYC
June 18, 2024
Testimony Provided by Nelson Mar**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing and for your ongoing efforts to support students in our public schools. My name is Nelson Mar, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Education Rights Project at Legal Services NYC (“LSNYC”) (<https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/about-us>).

LSNYC’s mission is to fight poverty and seek racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New York City residents. Through litigation, advocacy, education, and outreach, LSNYC has advanced the interests of our clients and created systemic changes that strengthen and protect low-income communities. We work to protect the rights of people with disabilities, veterans, immigrants, and the LGBTIQ+ community. We are deeply appreciative to the City Council for its many years of support for legal services, and for its championship of our mission and our work.

The Education Rights Project at LSNYC assists hundreds of New York City school children and their families each year to ensure access to education in all five boroughs. We represent students who are living with poverty, students with disabilities, students facing exclusionary discipline, English Language Learners (“ELL”s), and other vulnerable populations. Our attorneys and social workers assist families with education issues including school enrollment, language access, special education, disciplinary proceedings, transportation, reasonable accommodations, and academic intervention services with the goal of improving

educational outcomes and removing systemic inequities. Due to the long history of structural racism, these issues disproportionately impact students of color, especially Black students and families. Over 80% of our student clients are children of color and/or immigrants ranging in age from 3 to 22.

As advocates representing children in New York City, we see the positive impact on our clients and the school communities that they attend when resources are directed to provide meaningful literacy supports, restorative justice programs, healing centered approaches, and robust enrichment programs such as the arts and athletics.

Thank you, Chair Joseph for holding this important hearing today about Intro 266, a local law to establish a bullying prevention task force. It goes without saying that bullying is a serious issue impacting our public schools in NYC. As noted in the Committee Report for today's hearing, there has been a dramatic increase of over eight thousand reported incidents of bullying and harassment in NYC over the last four years which underscores the magnitude of the problem of bullying in our public schools.

The rise in reported incidents of bullying has occurred with the backdrop of the largest collective traumatic event humankind has ever experienced, the COVID 19 pandemic, and also during a time when our youth in this city and nationally are experiencing a mental health crisis.¹ According to the National Institutes of Health, bullying has been correlated with increased risk for mental health problems that include but not limited to depression, and school refusal/avoidance.² Often these difficulties require a greater need for higher levels of care which

¹ Kim Tingley, *There's a Mental-Health Crisis Among American Children. Why?* N.Y.TIMES (March 23, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/magazine/mental-health-crisis-kids.html>; The Kids Are Not Alright; Here's What We Need to Do About It (Spring 2023), <https://nyulangone.org/news/kids-are-not-alright-heres-what-we-need-to-do-about-it>.

² National Institute on Health, *How does bullying affect health and well-being?* <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/bullying/conditioninfo/health>, Last Reviewed Date: 1/31/2017

further burdens an already overstretched mental health care system.³ As such, it is important for the City to investigate this issue on a deeper level, a level that will examine the needs of all those involved in school related bullying incidents in order to devise a thorough plan to greatly diminish or prevent acts of bullying and harassment in our public schools.

Intro 266 as proposed, would be an important step in providing educators and policy makers a better understanding of bullying and how it can be prevented. However, the bill would benefit from the following changes:

- The definition of “Bullying” in Section 1a should include a reference to “one’s appearance.” Too often LSNYC has represented clients who have experienced bullying or harassment due to their general appearance. Some clients were targeted because the student did not wear the right brand of shoes or something about their appearance that stood out from others. Given the frequency with which our office has seen these forms of bullying in our clients’ cases, we believe it would be helpful for any bullying definition to contain a reference to “one’s appearance.”
- In addition to the 2 public meetings proposed in the bill in Section 1f, the task force should also be directed to convene “listening sessions” with agencies, organizations or community groups involved in the prevention of bullying. Many groups and organizations are working tirelessly and effectively to reduce bullying in our schools and they should be able to share that knowledge and experiences with the task force.

³ See, Testimony of Alice Bufkin before the New York City Council Committee on Finance, Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction and the Committee on Health Oversight Hearing on the FY2025 Executive Budget, Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, May 13, 2024 <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/nyc-youth-need-better-access-to-mental-health-care-and-the-city-can-make-investments-that-support-them>, citing Voicing Our Future 2021 study: <https://lookerstudio.google.com/reporting/a13f9c4f-3609-4075-9381-047a6dfb0254/page/MmEIC?s=lxGhynVc6ZE>

- The bill should require the report to include an analysis of the root causes of bullying and the impacts of bullying on all individuals in the school community including the individual who engaged in the bullying. Given our experience addressing bullying in schools, educators need to have a better understanding of the needs of students who engage in bullying in order for any plan to effectively minimize these behaviors.

Having dealt with bullying all my life, I can personally attest to the significant negative impacts of bullying. As child, I grew up as a frequent target of bullying as my family essentially integrated the predominantly white neighborhood of Whitestone, Queens during the mid 70's. My neighbors rallied outside of our house to tell my family that we were not welcome in the neighborhood and that we should leave and over the years, my family and I experienced assaults and vandalism in that neighborhood. Naturally the bullying I experienced in my neighborhood spilled over into the elementary school I attended.

My personal experiences ingrained a lifelong commitment in me to confront and stop bullying. This is reflected in my work at Legal Services NYC where we have worked closely with community partners to address bullying in meaningful ways. In 2018 Legal Services NYC and the New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center (NYPCC) helped found the Bronx Anti-Bullying Coalition.⁴ The Anti-Bullying Coalition has held annual resource fairs in the Bronx and more recently in Brooklyn to raise awareness about the issue of bullying and strategies to prevent and respond to incidents of bullying.

In addition, Legal Services NYC has been leading efforts to improve school climate in NYC public schools. Understanding that trauma is the root cause for a wide variety of issues, including bullying, our organization has led the effort to bring a “healing centered schools”

⁴ See, Anti-Bullying, New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center. <https://nypcc.org/anti-bullying/>

approach to our public school communities.⁵ Healing centered schools is a universalist approach that centers healing in the school community. Too many of our clients and the communities we serve are impacted by adverse experiences or traumatic events. Although exposure to trauma and adverse experiences can be harmful to a person’s development, research shows the human body can be resilient when provided meaningful support from those around them.

The impacts of trauma and toxic stress extend beyond the ability to learn and implicates a child’s physical, social and emotional development.⁶ Children with a history of exposure to trauma are likely to have difficulties responding to challenging situations in the school environment.⁷ Trauma can disrupt a student’s core beliefs about safety, security, and the world around them. Bullying and other forms of harassment can “severely affect a child’s or teen’s self-image, social interactions, or school performance, and can lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance use, and even suicidal thoughts and behaviors.”⁸ Furthermore, if a student has a history of trauma, they are at increased risk for engaging in bullying behaviors or being bullied by their peers.

But students impacted by trauma who have adequate support to make sense of their circumstances may experience psychological growth or post traumatic growth. Research shows that the negative effects of toxic stress can be lessened or even *healed* by building resilience through the support of caring adults and with appropriate interventions.⁹ Hence our efforts at

⁵ See, The Healing Centered Schools Working Group, Legal Services NYC. <https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/what-we-do/practice-areas-and-projects/access-to-education/community-roadmap-to-healing-centered-schools>

⁶ Center on the Developing Child, *The Impact of Early Adversity on Child Development (InBrief)*, HARVARD UNIVERSITY (2007), retrieved from www.developing_child.harvard.edu.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Peterson, S., *Effects*. THE NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK, (October 10, 2018) <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/bullying/effects>.

⁹ Center on the Developing Child, *The Science of Resilience (InBrief)*, HARVARD UNIVERSITY (2015). retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu; see also, Nicole R. Nugent et al., *Resilience after trauma: From surviving to thriving*. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5 EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOTRAUMATOLOGY 25339 (2014), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4185140/>.

Legal Services NYC to promote the adoption of healing centered practices to respond to the challenges presented by the high rates of exposure to trauma in our communities.

In conclusion, the goal of Intro 266 to create a task force to develop a plan to address and prevent bullying in schools is an important issue for our clients at Legal Services NYC's education unit. The issue of bullying is harmful to both students and staff and a more effective approach is needed given the recent increase in such incidents in the NYC public schools.

Thank you.



**JUSTICE THROUGH
COMMUNITY POWER**

**Comments of Megan Johannesen, Law Student Intern of New York Lawyers for the
Public Interest
to Council of the City of New York
Committee on Education on June 18, 2024
regarding Int. 0399-2024**

My name is Megan Johannesen, and I am a law student intern at the Disability Justice Program of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you, Council Members, for allowing us to speak on Int. 399 and to promote school accessibility in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and state and local non-discrimination laws. NYLPI interacts with students with disabilities and their families daily, and we hear about the difficulties they face in receiving services at school. In our work trying to help find appropriate programs for students, the availability of accessible schools and programs within the schools is a critical issue, but these programs should be easily available to all parents and advocates.

We join Advocates for Children in asking the City Council to promote accessibility in New York City public schools for people with disabilities, including students, families and caretakers, teachers, administrators, and anyone who needs to enter the schools. The ADA requires state and local governments to make reasonable modifications for accessibility and follow federal accessibility standards when constructing new or renovated facilities. *Access (Still) Denied*, ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN (Aug. 23, 2023), <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0cd31f41c8224f68a91b913b733bf46d>. However, at the start of the 2023-2024 school year, only 494 of 1,587 schools were fully accessible, which is fewer than one third of all schools in New York City. *Id.* When a school is not accessible, students may not be able to attend schools in their neighborhood. *Id.* In order to make at least half the schools fully accessible by 2029, the City must invest at

least \$1.25 billion for school accessibility projects. *Id.*; *City Education Budget Priorities for FY 2025 1*, ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN, https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/fy25_budget_priorities.pdf, (last updated June 2024).

In addition to ensuring physical accessibility in New York City public schools, we must make data about school placements and services for students with disabilities easily accessible to the entire community and subject to greater oversight by policymakers. As discussed in the recently published NYLPI report entitled “[A Crisis in Special Education: New York City's Failure to Educate Students Classified with ‘Emotional Disability’ -- A Proposal for Systemic Change](#),” there are over 7,000 students in the New York City education system who are classified as having an “emotional disability.” Critical data is incredibly difficult to come by, even for those who have the ability to file a Freedom of Information Law request. The NYLPI report identified an urgent need for the Department of Education (DOE) to collect data about students classified with an “emotional disability,” including data about Black and Latino students who are classified with an “emotional disability” at vastly disproportionate rates relative to their percentage in the school population.

Children with disabilities deserve the City’s commitment to investing in their education, including, most critically, investing in accessible schools and collection and publishing relevant educational data. Thank you for your time and attention.

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Testimony: City Council Education Committee hearing on Tuesday, June 18th

Int 0266-2024

Good afternoon, my name is Gabriela Mejia, I'm the Movement Building and Communications Manager at Right To Be. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony, representing my community as a New Yorker and my organization's work. Founded in Brooklyn in 2005 - Right To Be works address all forms of harassment including public space harassment, online harassment, and schools.¹ We also work to address harassment against all protected classes, including race, religion, gender, and ability.

Our work focuses on turning the care we have for each other into simple, creative, effective action. Every day, we train hundreds of people to respond to, intervene in and heal from harassment. We hold space for people experiencing harassment to share their stories for affirmation and support. And we prepare new leaders to create workplaces, schools and communities around our city and around the world that are filled with humanity.

Today we would like to offer our support to the initiative introduced by Council Member Rita C. Joseph, for the establishment of a bullying prevention task force. Right To Be is currently providing a comprehensive bystander intervention training for youth and in working with youth throughout the city, it's clear that you people are facing high rates of bullying and harassment in school settings - and that intervention is needed.

The impact of bullying on young people's mental health can be significant and lasting, affecting their relationships, responses, and potential for years to come. Bullying and discrimination can lead to trouble sleeping, distraction/inability to focus, decreased participation in class, and thoughts about transferring schools. In particular, BIPOC communities, girls, LGBTQ+, immigrant youth, and young people with disabilities face increased harassment targeting their identities, with long term negative impacts on their health, confidence, economic/school success, and safety. Students face bullying and harassment at a young age, with the National Center for Educational Statistics indicating that almost 22% of students report experiencing bullying, with the majority of students facing bullying in 6th grade (NCES, 2021-092)

¹ For information on our programs visit <https://www.righttobe.org>

Despite the realities of bullying and harassment, young people are ready to stand against it. Over two-thirds of students are willing to step in, defend, support, or assist those being bullied at school when they see it (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). However, there are barriers to safe intervention, including “not knowing what to do” and “not knowing who to tell” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). Right To Be hears from teachers across the city and the country who share that students are standing up to violence, but often unsafely, and without a clear understanding of escalation.

There is a clear need for effective anti-bullying training in schools that addresses the full spectrum of violence young people are facing. Bystander intervention is a promising tool in addressing violence and improving school climate. Through our work with young people in NYC, we've seen the profound impact that anti-harassment training can have. One 10th grade student shared with us:

"I'm committed to bringing communication into this world as it's one value that is often overlooked in everyday life...Most, if not all conflicts or arguments stem from failed or missed communication. Communication and understanding the opinions, background, and feelings of others can help with reducing conflicts throughout life and bettering all of our experience."

We hope that through the establishment of the Bullying Prevention Task Force, students can be empowered similarly all around the city, and we are ready to support the efforts brought forward by the city council members.

Currently, Right To Be's curriculum addresses the spectrum of bullying, harassment, and discrimination inside and outside of the classroom and you can learn more about the program, its impact and read additional reflections from students in the addendum included below. We hope all students in this city are given tools to identify, safely respond to, and heal from bullying and harassment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for your commitment to making New York City a great place to work for all New Yorkers.

ADDENDUM:

Overview of Right To Be's Current Programming

Right To Be's *Bystander Intervention for Youth* program includes bystander intervention trainings for students alongside resources for teachers and parents to support youth mental health and safety. The curriculum is built as a 4-week (20 lesson) base, which can be adjusted for 2-week or 8-week sessions depending on each school's capacity and availability. Each lesson runs for 25-30 minutes, including an optional 15-20 minute expansion to practice techniques and provide opportunities for experiential learning.

Over the course of the curriculum, students:

- Deepen their understanding of bullying and discrimination, the history and spectrum of disrespect, and its impacts on mental health
- Learn how to safely and effectively intervene when they witness in-person and online harassment using Right To Be's 5D's of bystander intervention: distract, delegate, document, delay, and direct
- Learn how to respond when they experience harassment, including step-by-step safety protocols to protect your school work and personal safety
- Practice intervention strategies to gain familiarity and confidence in standing up to all forms of harassment
- Gain proven tools to de-escalate violence and reduce trauma, giving people a tangible action they can take to care for one another

We believe that engaging youth is critical in addressing youth mental health and equity. **Young people are ready to lead and looking for solutions.** With Right To Be's bystander intervention curriculum, we equip young people with the tools to support their own and their peer's social and emotional wellbeing.

Over the next three years, we're working to expand the program nationwide, reaching students with the tools to respond to and de-escalate violence - but as an organization based in NYC we piloted our program in this city and hope it can set an example.

Impact:

To date, Right To Be's bystander intervention programming shows that 98.8% of participants gain strategies to safely intervene when witnessing conflict and

discrimination against their peers. What's more, 67% of participants actively use bystander intervention in their daily lives within one year of the program.

A 10th grade student who recently attended our trainings, shared that, as a result of Right To Be's curriculum,

*"I definitely became **more aware about harassment and how it really is a problem that we continue to face today**- I've been fortunate enough to live in [an] environment, where I don't necessarily run into hate...so I tend to overlook how big of a problem this is in society. Because this was based on real life people talking about their own experiences, it made me learn that it still happens to many of my own friends, and I further learned how to tackle these experiences if it were to happen to me."*

A 12th grade student shares that, after completing the curriculum,

*"The 5 D's had a tremendous impact. Not only did I learn about it in an easy to memorize manner, but **it also helped me be a leader in my everyday life.**"*

Another 10th grade student shares, that as a result of the trainings,

*"I'm committed to bringing communication into this world as it's one value that is often overlooked in everyday life...**Most, if not all conflicts or arguments stem from failed or missed communication.** Communication and understanding the opinions, background, and feelings of others can help with reducing conflicts throughout life and bettering all of our experience."*



**Testimony to NY City Council Education Committee
Delivered In-Person at Hearing on Resolution 0095-2024
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon Council Members. Thank you for holding this hearing on Resolution 95, in support of religious diversity education in New York City’s public schools. I’m Dr. Henry Goldschmidt. I’m the Director of Programs at the [Interfaith Center of New York](#), and director of the [Religious Worlds of New York](#) summer institute for teachers – a program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, that helps K-12 teachers from throughout the United States teach about religious diversity.

My colleagues from faith-based organizations have spoken movingly about the experiences of bullying and harassment faced by far too many young New Yorkers. The Interfaith Center of New York shares their concerns, and we strongly urge the City Council – as well as the Department of Education – to support religious diversity education, as an essential step to address bullying against religious minorities in our public schools.

In my remarks, however, I will focus on the many benefits of religious diversity education for *all* young New Yorkers. Given the First Amendment framework that appropriately governs our public schools, it is essential for the City Council to understand that religious diversity education is *not* just intended to benefit religious students.

Indeed, the academic study of religion can contribute to a number of the DOE’s fundamental educational goals. In order to be truly educated in American history, global studies, literature, or the arts, our students need a rich understanding of religion and religious diversity. How, for example, can they hope to understand the African-American civil rights movement without a basic knowledge of the Black Church? In order to succeed in their professional lives, our students need the religious literacy required to build relationships with diverse colleagues. How, for example, can they work effectively and respectfully with observant Jews or Muslims without a basic knowledge of the kosher and halal dietary laws? And in order to participate in civic life, our

students need an empathic understanding of their diverse neighbors' beliefs and values. Religious diversity education is thus essential to the health of our multicultural democracy.

For all these reasons, the National Council for the Social Studies has endorsed the study of religion as a component of their [C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#). And for all these reasons, the study of religion in public schools is clearly permissible under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Indeed, in the [1963 Supreme Court decision](#) that banned school-sponsored devotional Bible reading in public schools, the court stated:

[I]t might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion Nothing we have said here indicates that such study . . . when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.

The Interfaith Center of New York therefore joins with diverse religious leaders, educators, policy makers, and the Supreme Court in calling upon the New York City Council to adapt Resolution 95, and support religious diversity education in our public schools.

TESTIMONY
The Legal Aid Society
to
The New York City Council
Committee on Education

Int. No. 0399-2024 Requiring the Department of Education to Provide Information Regarding
Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Int. No. 0432-2024 Distributing Information About After School Programs

Int. No. 0771-2024 Requiring Distribution of Information Regarding Phone Interpretation
Services

June 18, 2024

Prepared by: Melinda Andra, Esq.

Introduction

The Legal Aid Society welcomes the opportunity to testify and thanks Chairperson Joseph and the Committee on Education for holding this important hearing. We also wish to thank the Public Advocate and council members Sanchez and Lee for introducing important legislation aimed at providing information to New York City families regarding accessible schools, after school programs and the availability of phone interpretation services offered by the Department of Education.

The Legal Aid Society is the nation's largest and oldest provider of legal services to low-income families and individuals. Throughout our more than 145-year-history, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Our mission is simple: we believe that no New Yorker should be denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. From offices in all five boroughs, the Society annually provides legal assistance to low-income families and individuals in nearly 200,000 legal matters each year, including education advocacy for school-age children and youth. The Legal Aid Society encompasses three practice areas: the Criminal Defense Practice, the Civil Practice and the Juvenile Rights Practice.

The Criminal Defense Practice is the premier public defender program in the country, handling 125,000 criminal matters in a typical year. Our victories in and out of the courtroom protect the constitutional rights of our clients and strive for greater humanity in the criminal legal system. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court are school-age teenagers and young adults who need and are legally entitled to receive educational services and many of them are young parents with children who also require educational services.

The Civil Practice provides specialized, comprehensive, legal assistance across a range of areas that benefits more than 135,000 New Yorkers each year. Through our efforts, we secure essentials of life for our clients such as stable housing, family law assistance, access to health care, and life-changing immigration law assistance so that our clients can effectively care for themselves and their families. Many clients of the civil practice are parents of children who attend New York City Public Schools.

The Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear in New York City's Family Courts due to involvement with the family regulation system, the juvenile legal system, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Our Juvenile Rights staff typically represents a total of more than 30,000 children each year. Our work with these most vulnerable New Yorkers keeps them safe and makes our city's families and communities stronger.

The Legal Aid Society engages in educational advocacy for our clients, in the areas of special education, school discipline, and school placement and programming through the Education Advocacy Project in the Juvenile Rights and Criminal Defense Practices and the Education Law Project in the Civil Practice. In addition to representing these children each year in school meetings, administrative hearings, appeals, and court proceedings, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients.

Our perspective comes from our daily contacts with children, youths, and their families as well as our frequent interactions with courts, social service providers, and NYC agencies, including the Departments of Education (DOE), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Homeless Services (DHS); the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

The Legal Aid Society submits the instant testimony focusing on measures intended to provide essential information to New York City families.

I. Int. No. 0399-2024 Requiring the Department of Education to Provide Information Regarding Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Fifty years after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), only about a third of all New York City schools were fully accessible to students, parents and educators with physical disabilities or mobility challenges.¹ Moreover, it is nearly impossible for a New York City parent attempting to help their child with school applications to determine which schools would be accessible to them or to their children. It is estimated that by 2029 only 50% of New York Public Schools will be fully accessible.²

Many of our clients who have physical disabilities, or whose parents have limitations to their mobility are unable to access their home zoned school. As a result, not only do these children have a longer commute to school every day, but families struggle to even identify which school buildings would allow them and their children to have full access, meaning access to all functional areas of the school, including classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, art rooms, water fountains, and other essential areas of the school.

The Legal Aid Society therefore thanks Public Advocate Williams, and Council Members Hanif, Brewer, Gennaro and Restler for introducing Int. No. 0399-2024, aimed at providing greater transparency for New York families by requiring the district to report information about

¹ New York City Public Schools, Office of Space Management, “Five-Year Accessibility Plan (2024-2028) – New York City Local Law 12 of 2023,” p. 5, Revised 4/2/24, Available at nycdoe.sharepoint.com/sites/BAP/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FBAP%2FShared%20Documents%2FLocal%20Law%2012%20Public%2FFive-Year%20Accessibility%20Plan%20-%20NYCPS%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FBAP%2FShared%20Documents%2FLocal%20Law%2012%20Public&p=true&ga=1

² *Id.*

the accessibility of public schools. The reporting requirements of the bill will provide lawmakers with information about the district's compliance with the ADA and will allow legislators and building planners to make decisions about building allocations aimed at improving accessibility.

In addition, by providing affected families with the information they need about accessibility, contact information for each school's ADA coordinator and information for requesting an accommodation under the ADA, this law will enable parents to identify schools that they and their children can access.

II. Int. No. 0432-2024 Distributing Information About After School Programs

Participation in after school programs provide long term benefits to students by providing opportunities for young people to participate in academic enrichment or tutoring programs, to engage in pro social recreational programs and to be maintained in a safe, adult supervised after school environment while parents are working. We support Council Member Sanchez' proposal to require schools to provide families with information about after school programs to include a list of programs at their schools, along with information about eligibility requirements and the application process. This information will assist parents looking for such opportunities for their children and will be a particular help to working parents who rely on these programs to ensure their children are in a safe, supported environment.

III. Int. No. 0771-2024 Requiring Distribution of Information Regarding Phone Interpretation Services

Parents must be able to effectively communicate with school staff in order to be an active participant in their child's education. We therefore thank Council Member Lee for introducing

Int. 0771-2024. Many parents are unaware of the language services provided by the district and their communication with teachers, social workers and other schools staff is therefore impeded. This deprives parents who are not English proficient of the ability to access reports about their children's progress and education. Often parents are not told that they have the right to language services, and instead rely on their children, other family members, or friends for interpretation in violation of Local Law 30 and Chancellor's Regulation A-663.

This legislation, requiring each school to share information about interpretation services and information about how to access those services, will serve New York City families whose primary language is not English by providing them with the tools to effectively communicate with their children's schools.

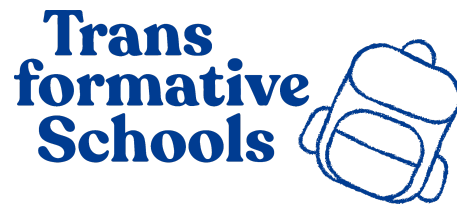
Conclusion

We thank the sponsors and urge the City Council to pass each of these measures intended to provide essential information to New York City families. These bills will enable families to fully access their schools, benefit from afterschool programming, and fully participate in their children's educations. Many thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Testimony Supporting Introduction 0118-2024 and Resolution 0292-2024

New York City Council
Committee on Education Hearing
June 18, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Alaina Daniels. I'm a white, queer, neurodivergent, nonbinary, trans woman and teacher. I've been teaching at New York City middle and high schools for twelve years. I've taught science, activism, sex education, robotics, algebra, engineering, queer media, biology, and been a lunch lady. Currently, I'm the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Transformative Schools.

Throughout my career, I have observed marginalized students and teachers being policed by dress codes in ways that privileged community members are not judged. As an eighth grade advisor, Black and Brown, queer, trans, and fat students often came to me upset that they had been punished for wearing tank tops and crop tops while their skinny white straight cis peers were not. Together we researched the history of dress codes and discussed solutions. We came to the belief that due to implicit bias in our oppressive world, no dress code will ever be enforced equitably. We decided to advocate for a new dress code that simply stated: "We trust students to choose what to wear to school. Please don't be hateful."

After significant organizing, including teach-ins and showing up to school wearing t-shirts with slogans like "Girls Don't Dress For Boys" and "Is This Against The Dress Code, Too?," we convinced the school leadership to trepidatiously adopt our proposed dress code. Five years later, there hasn't been a problem.

I am here today to support to Quadira Coles and Girls for Gender Equity as they lead this work at the city and state level. As a science teacher who loves data and yet only had anecdotes to share above, I want to especially thank Quadira and GGE for the ginormous amount of effort collecting data and sharing their research reports. As I love to tell students, "Science and math are some of the most powerful tools to change the world."

While GGE collected extensive data about the ways that dress codes themselves are oppressive, we need to ensure that we are counting trans kids, especially trans girls, especially those who are additionally marginalized by race, religion, or body size. As we have repeatedly heard today, trans girls' gender modality is not currently collected in any of the DOE data, including about dress codes or bullying.

However, we do know that:

- At least 3% of NYC youth are transgender or nonbinary
- Nationally, 85% of trans youth feel unsafe at school, 44% missed school and 25% changed schools due to safety concerns¹
- In the past year, 50% of trans youth seriously considered suicide while 20% attempted it²
- 38% have experienced homelessness or housing instability³
- 86% of transgender and nonbinary youth say recent debates around anti-trans bills have negatively impacted their mental health⁴

Please improve Resolution 0292 (and also Resolution 0266) to ensure that the NYC DOE is not erasing some of our most marginalized young people and then pass these and other information requesting resolutions to provide us with data to prove who is being unfairly punished. This will allow us to make targeted interventions in schools to limit harm to students.

Students can't learn math and science if they don't feel safe and seen at school.

Thank you for your time!

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. GLSEN.
https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NSCS19-FullReport-032421-Web_0.pdf

² Paley, A. (2022). 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. The Trevor Project.
https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf

³ Morton, Matthew; Dworsky, Amy; Miranda-Samuels, Gina; Patel, Somali. (Sept 2018). Voices of Youth Count Comprehensive Report: Youth Homelessness in America Report to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

⁴ Trevor Project (2023). "New Poll Emphasizes Negative Impacts of Anti-LGBTQ Policies on LGBTQ Youth," June 20, 2024,
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/new-poll-emphasizes-negative-impacts-of-anti-lgbtq-policies-on-lgbtq-youth/>.

NYC City Council Committee on Education Hearing June 18, 2024

To The NYC City Council Committee on Education,

Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to Be Youth Project is dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. We provide free legal services for individual LGBTQ+ young people up to the age of 24 and systemic advocacy for the LGBTQ+ youth community. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are low-income, living on the streets, in homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system or foster care. We regularly travel to drop-in centers where homeless youth congregate to offer direct legal services. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing, and being wrongly turned away from our City's homeless shelters.

Disproportionate Impact of Dress Codes on TGNCNBI Students

For many transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex (TGNCNBI) individuals, clothing and personal accessories do not serve as provocative classroom distractions but rather, as crucial forms of gender-affirming care that can be life-saving. Trans youth are 4 to 7 times more likely to experience depression than their cisgender peers,¹ however, engaging in some form of gender affirmation, including dress, has been shown to decrease depression, thoughts of suicide, and self-harm significantly.² DOE school dress codes must be amended to support all students' gender expression and protect students from discriminatory policies.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) currently grants students the right to choose their clothing and hairstyles unless it "is dangerous, interferes with the teaching and learning process, or violates the DOE's anti-discrimination policy."³ While these policies are intended to establish non-discriminatory protections, biased interpretations of this language have sexualized

¹ Dani Dodge Medlin. "Transgender Youth More Often Diagnosed with Mental Health Conditions." Kaiser Permanente Department of Research & Evaluation, February 21, 2019.

<https://www.kp-scalresearch.org/transgender-youth-more-often-diagnosed-with-mental-health-conditions/>.

² Jaclyn M. W. Hughto, Hamish A. Gunn, Brian A. Rood, and David W. Pantalone, "Social and Medical Gender Affirmation Experiences Are Inversely Associated with Mental Health Problems in a U.S. Non-Probability Sample of Transgender Adults," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 49, (2020): 2635-2647.

³ "Dress Code Guidelines," *NYC Public Schools*, 2024,

<https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/school-environment/dress-code-guidelines>.

and criminalized students, particularly trans and cis girls, TGNCNBI students, students of color, and low-income students.

TGNCNBI students are vulnerable to implicit and explicit biases from administrators, staff, and their peers from interpretation to implementation. Rather than using gender-neutral language to regulate clothing, a majority of DOE schools explicitly ban pieces of clothing stereotypically associated with femininity, such as “crop tops,” “halter tops,” “short shorts,” “mini skirts,” and “distracting” dress.⁴ Other dress codes in the DOE included terms such as “skimpy” or “suggestive.” This language targets trans and cis girls through the over-policing and hypersexualization of femme gender presentation. Historically, hypersexualization has functioned as a tool of oppression against Black women,⁵ and today Black women disproportionately experience sexual harassment and are more likely to experience victim blaming for their sexual harassment.⁶ While some legislative measures have been taken to protect Black students, the current DOE policy continues to leave room for biased policies that target trans and cis girls, TGNCNBI students, and youth of color.

The 2019 Crown Act amended the Dignity for All Students Act to prohibit the policing of natural hairstyles even if the regulations are described as “race-neutral,” deeming it a form of racial discrimination. Despite this, many schools restrict head coverings, wigs, and “distracting” hairstyles. Most NYC schools had written consequences more severe than the DOE’s guidance.⁷ This is more damaging to Black students, who face a 31% higher likelihood of experiencing a discretionary discipline action than white and Latine students nationally. Black students are also more likely than white students to be suspended for the same first-time violations of discretionary rules, like violating the dress code. The frequent use of subjective and biased language in these dress codes grants school staff discretion in enforcing disciplinary action, thereby leaving Black students more vulnerable to discrimination.⁸

Our Clients

Davina, a Black transgender woman who went to elementary through high school in Brooklyn, witnessed and experienced first-hand racial and gender discrimination due to her school’s dress codes. Her high school’s dress code banned “revealing” clothing, such as spaghetti straps, short shorts, and short skirts. Girls like her curvier sister frequently faced dress code violations and were told to buy larger clothes to fix the “issue,” even though her clothing fit her body appropriately. While administrators took issue with femme-presenting bodies, boys wore what Davina described as nearly see-through tank tops without discipline. However, not all boys were exempt from biased dress codes, as she remembers all Black students being heavily policed in

⁴ Girls for Gender Equity, “Suspending Self-Expression,” January 2020.

⁵ Girls for Gender Equity, “Suspending Self-Expression Part II,” October 2021.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ GGE, “Suspending.”

⁸ GGE, “Suspending Part II.”

their dress; snapback hats, durags, and bonnets were not permitted, the latter two characterized as “sleepwear” by the school.

For Davina, dress codes had a bleak impact on her self-expression as a trans woman. She began her transition after leaving DOE schools, explaining that if she had transitioned in high school and wanted to express her true self, she felt she would have gotten suspended. She wanted to attend school to create opportunities for her future. Still, it was difficult when she could not express her true self and sexualizing narratives of femininity were brought home. When she finally did transition after high school, showing off her body by wearing skirts or other clothing stereotypically associated with femininity was extremely gender-affirming to her; however, these were the articles of clothing that had been sexualized and banned by adult administrators.

Conclusion

In order to rectify this form of racial and gendered discrimination in NY school systems, the Committee on Education must:

- **Establish Gender, Race, and Body Type Neutral Dress Codes**

The DOE must provide comprehensive guidelines for a dress code policy that complies with Title IX of the Federal Education Amendments Act, with specific attention to the inclusion and equity of trans and cis girls, trans and gender-expansive youth, Black students, and body-diverse students.

- **Increased Data Collection on DOE Dress Codes**

While Girls for Gender Equity’s two reports provide detailed insight into the discrimination ingrained in many New York Schools’ dress codes, this research is limited. To fully ensure discrimination does not continue in practice, the DOE must provide substantial data to elucidate the scale of discrimination in New York schools’ dress code policies.

- Each school must provide a comprehensive report on its dress code, including whether the dress code includes disciplinary provisions, and whether its language discriminates according to gender, or has the opportunity to do so in practice despite gender-neutral language
- Each school must provide a report on the disciplinary infractions the school has issued in the previous year based on dress codes including resulting student penalties, student’s birth-assigned gender, current gender identity, racial and ethnic identities, and religious identity

Thank you to the members of this Committee and to Girls for Gender Equity and Trans formative Schools who have been working hard to address the needs of these youth communities. The Free to Be Youth Project stands ready to assist the NYC City Council Committee on Education in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Leipziger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Leipziger".

Amy Leipziger
Project Director
Free to Be Youth Project, UJC



JOURNALISM FOR ALL

Who we are

The NYC Youth Journalism Coalition advocates for equitable access to youth journalism opportunities. Our members include service providers, students, teachers, colleges & universities, funders and newsrooms.

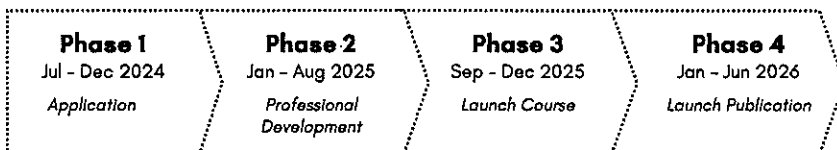
What is Journalism for All?

A citywide initiative to bring journalism programs to every New York City public high school, starting with 30 schools by the end of 2025.

How Council Members can support

- Co-Sponsor Resolution 0372
- Nominate a school from your district to join the first Journalism for All cohort
- Provide FY26 discretionary funding to support a Journalism for All school in your district

Roadmap



Problem

Only 26% of NYC public high schools have student news publications.

Of the 100 schools with the lowest poverty rates, 62% have publications.

Of the 100 schools with the highest poverty rates, only 7% have publications.

Baruch College (2022)

School will Receive:

- A free curriculum from CUNY Newmark J-School
- Paid teacher PD over the summer at Newmark
- Connections to newsrooms and organizations across the city to provide in-school support and out-of-school opportunities
- A start-up grant for new software or equipment

School will Commit to:

- Creating an elective course for 3 consecutive academic years
- Selecting a teacher to complete PD and lead the course
- Launching a student news outlet within two years
- Ensuring YJC and partner orgs can measure success of program (pre-/post-surveys, school culture data)



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Aaqib Gondal

My name is Aaqib Gondal. I am a junior at the Bronx High School of Science and a leader with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition. Since my sophomore year, I've been a writer for The Science Survey, The Bronx High School of Science's student newspaper. The stories I've covered and the perspective that I've gained from my time as a staff reporter are invaluable to me, and I feel that it is an absolute injustice that so many teens in NYC high schools with the desire to inform the public about what they feel is worth understanding are unable to do..

It was through my articles and the topics that I latched onto that my interests in art history and urban studies began to blossom, providing me with insight as to what I want to focus on going forward both in college and in my personal life. It seems that everything I write about sticks with me long after each issue is published, and I now understand more about myself both as a creative and as a person than I would have if my school only offered traditional English classes.

The satisfaction in piecing a story together to create a final product that is not only informative but also sprinkled with reflections of the writer's personality is a feeling that is unmatched outside of journalism. And to think that nearly 75%% of high schools in New York City do not have a school newspaper - it is not only unfair to students with stories to share with the world but also a tragedy in the sense that so many incredible writing pieces constructed by the youth are lost forever, reduced to simply "what could have been."

We're here today not just to testify in support of resolution 0372, but to place it in a larger context of a citywide student movement to address the inequity.

In partnership with BLAC, we led a day of action right here at City Hall in April with more than 50 students leaving school to raise awareness about youth journalism equity. We held a press conference, shoutout to Council Members Narcisse and Bronx Science Alumni Council Member Dinowitz for standing with us even in the rain. We also met with more than 20 council members and staff including Council Members Hanif and Lewis. Students are ready to make their voices heard, and this resolution is a critical step in signaling that the City Council is behind them. Thank you for your time.

Salma Baksh

My name is Salma Baksh. I am a senior at Forest Hills High School and a leader with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition. Had I not become a member of my school newspaper, I would not be submitting this testimony. Besides the obvious fact that my positive experience in a journalism program provides substance for my testimony, journalism has made me more ambitious and outspoken, giving me the tools necessary to challenge and criticize the world around me. In short, high school journalism has cultivated me into a change-maker who's confident in making their voice heard.

The newsroom is a classroom in its own right. Being editor-in-chief of my school paper taught me how to communicate effectively, to be perceptive to the things happening around me, and to manage a team.

Most high schools in NYC don't have newspapers, despite NYC being regarded as a beacon for news media. In an era marked by instability and chaos, who will be our future storytellers? When only 7% of NYC schools with the highest poverty rates have newspapers, how can we expect that the stories that must be told, will be told?

School newspapers are transformative, and more important than ever to students and the world they live in.

We refuse to let the status quo stand, and resolution 0372 is part of a bigger story. This Spring, we launched Journalism for All, an ambitious public-private initiative to bring journalism programs to every New York City public high school, starting with 30 schools in the next 18 months. Nearly 40 schools have indicated interest already, and we are working directly with Council Members to nominate schools in their district to be a part of Journalism for All. A special shout out to Council Member Gutierrez, who nominated Williamsburg Preparatory High School and Bushwick Leaders High School for Academic Excellence.

Your co-sponsorship for Resolution 0372 signals to the DOE that the Council is serious about addressing the inequity in youth journalism. Fourteen Council Members have already co-sponsored, including Council Member Schulman who I will be interning for this summer! Thank you for your time.

Camila Sosa

My name is Camila Sosa. I am a junior at Uncommon Collegiate High School and a leader with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition. For the past 3 years, Talk surrounding a potential publication in my school continues to be spoken about as if it is a distant dream. I would imagine the stories we could tell and the perspectives we could share in this hypothetical newspaper that felt impossibly out of reach. I constantly wished that one day the students at my school would finally be able to share the stories that mattered to them and be able to feel heard.

I understood that our school was underfunded and I knew that there were so many details out of our control, but I also knew the importance of student expression and why it was imperative to have a place to unleash our voices.

It was not until I started exploring journalism in NYC that I realized the extent of this gap in access. I was able to experience the power of youth voice and how capable students were of making change through their writing and talents. Students shouldn't have to rely on the "game" of chance that journalism equity is in NYC. Students shouldn't have to get "Lucky" to start a career in journalism. Student voice is the future and it should be treated as such.

In early June, we laid out the Journalism for All vision to 150+ teachers, funders, policymakers and journalists at the Paley Center. We were joined by special guests Nikole Hannah-Jones, Council Member Rita Joseph and Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers, who announced her Journalism for All school nomination on stage.

It was a symbol of the immense momentum behind youth journalism equity, and this resolution is a critical step in showing that the City Council hears and supports our vision for a school journalism program at every high school. Thank you for your time.

Liza Greenberg

My name is Liza Greenberg. I am a junior at the Bronx High School of Science. For the past year, I have been involved with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition. I have been an avid student journalist since I created a newspaper at my middle school in fifth grade, the Center School Gazette. Now, in high school, I have worked on my paper, The Science Survey, for the past two years, this year serving as managing editor.

Student journalism is a central part of my identity. It has made me who I am; someone who looks for stories, dives into the facts, and raises topics for discussion. Journalism can prepare students to ask the hard questions, and in turn, handle controversial and loaded topics delicately and fairly.

By providing a shared base of information and ideas, student journalism outlets can also foster a sense of community that unites diverse, city-wide student bodies and provides a counterweight to the polarizing effects of social media. Newspapers can be a venue to build excitement about events and to celebrate accomplishments and talents, be it in sports, writing, humor, or photography.

The lack of journalism opportunities in New York City is a story that is important to me, and I was able to write about it with my friend and fellow advocate Derry in Teen Vogue. This is just another example of the great momentum around this issue that you can be a part of by supporting this resolution. Thank you for your time.

Derry Oliver

My name is Derry Oliver. I am a senior at Cobble Hill High School and a leader with the New York City Youth Journalism Coalition. Colleges may see me as student number 347,288. But I have a different story. I am a victim of systemic inequity, where I lack access to a journalism program. I've been told "to look harder", only to find the New York Times summer journalism workshop that costs thousand dollars per week.

I'm told to pursue my passions, and yet I'm not given the opportunity to do so. I'm told "school is where you learn the most", and yet- I'm not given the opportunity to do so. I do not want future young journalists to struggle the same way I did. I could've done internships, college credit, possibly even become editor-in-chief. However, my playing field was unequal the moment I came into high school. The access to a journalism program shouldn't be a privilege- it should be a right.

The Council's support for this student-led movement has been critical in catalyzing private philanthropic support. In addition to the students, educators, and service providers who are a part of our movement, we are working with foundations to raise funds to launch the first cohort of Journalism for All. We must keep the momentum going. Your support for this resolution is critical, but not the end. We will be back after the budget is passed, ready to work with you to nominate schools in your district and commit to supporting them with your discretionary funding in Fiscal Year 2026. We need urgent, continuous, dedicated action on behalf of the students of New York City. We would now all be happy to take your questions. Thank you for your time.



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: Fevour Edosa
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and the Members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Fevour Edosa, and I am a part of the Speakers' Bureau program at Girls for Gender Equity.

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around gender-based violence and ending school pushout for close to two decades.

I am offering testimony today in support of [Int. 0118-2024](#) and [Res. 0292-2024](#), which, if passed, would help all schools. I also offer testimony to demonstrate the positive outcomes that arise from implementing good policies that include student perspectives and to highlight the profound impact of allowing individuals to express themselves and develop their unique styles.

Growing up, I had the freedom to wear whatever I wanted to school. In fact, I often wondered if my school even had a dress code policy because it was never a constraint for me. This freedom was incredibly beneficial as it helped me develop my own sense of style and allowed me to express myself in unique ways.

Being able to experiment with my clothing choices during those formative years played a significant role in shaping my personal identity. I now have a

strong sense of style, something that might not have been possible if I had been restricted by a strict dress code.

High school is a critical time for self-discovery, and it's important to set a foundation that allows students to feel comfortable with themselves and their styles. Life doesn't end in high school, and there isn't a dress code once you leave. By giving students the freedom to explore their personal style during high school, we help them build confidence that will benefit them long after graduation.

Because of my experimentation, I was able to develop a sense of confidence and style beyond highschool. Passing Int. 0118 and Res. 0292 will ensure that all schools have dress codes that allow their students to experience this growth and development. Alongside these bills, schools should train teachers and staff on how to best handle students who do not adhere to dress code policies in ways that do not impede their self-expression and confidence growth.

My name is Husein Yatabarry.

Islamophobia post-9/11 was quite high in the public school system for a Black Muslim student like myself. "Saddam Hussein," "terrorist," "Osama"—these were just a few of the Islamophobic insults that students thought were "jokes."

You would think there would be a tremendous difference in 2024, but NYCPS reports highlight the urgency, with 367 religious bias incidents recorded between September 2022 and June 2023. This data is available thanks to Local Law 51.

Since October 7th, there have been 281 bias incidents in NYC public schools, and approximately 30% of these were Islamophobic (Testimony from the Chancellor in Congress, May 8th).

That number should be zero, no matter what is happening in the world. There is work being done with NYCPS to Meet the Moment, but this legislation has been in City Council for at least three years, and the policy we request could have been in implementation by now.

Education policy is extremely difficult. But I think it's imperative, even though resolutions are symbolic, for our city's legislators to make a statement in support of collaborative efforts for our school system to promote religious diversity understanding in schools for students and adults. Not just to Meet this Moment, but to Meet every moment.

Many religious groups, including the Muslim community, find New York to be their largest population in our country. But there's no standardization to how this looks within our community schools, where some schools are incredibly accommodating and inviting, while others are cold spaces that make our children and school staff feel isolated.

Resolution 0095 was formerly Res 476 and before that Res 1257. For us, this must be the last number this resolution will have because this statement needs to be made not just by our coalition but by the City Council to say inclusivity and religious diversity are not just tolerated but supported.

What does Resolution 0095-2024 call for? The resolution calls upon the New York City Department of Education to:

- **Consult with faith-based organizations to develop and provide all grade levels with a curriculum that focuses on religious diversity.**

- **Provide professional development focused on religious diversity for teachers, staff, and administrators.**
- **Ensure accurate classification of hate needing action by schools to condemn bullying and harassment based on religious clothing, food requirements, and the need for prayer space and time year-round.**
- **Immediate notification and full disclosure to parents of hate crime statistics.**

This bill is not merely about introducing a curriculum; it's about shaping the minds and hearts of our young generation and educators. By educating them about the rich tapestry of religious beliefs and practices that coexist in our city, we are equipping them with the tools to build a more inclusive future. We are giving them the lens to see not differences, but commonalities and shared human values. We also prevent our city from being used as a vehicle for hate.

I urge the City Council to recognize the importance of Resolution 0095, a defining moment to affirm our city's values of respect and inclusivity. Your support is crucial for the well-being of our communities and the future of our children.

Thank you.



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: Isabelle Chow
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and Members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Isabelle Chow, and I am a recent graduate of the Masters of Social Work program at Hunter College and a social work intern with the Sisters in Strength program at Girls for Gender Equity. I am testifying today in support of [Int. 0118-2024](#) to require the Department of Education (DOE) to report on dress code policies in DOE schools and [Res. 292-2024](#) to create an inclusive school dress code policy that complies with Title IX statewide.

Many case studies^{1,2} have shown that school climate plays a large role in the outcomes of students in that school. Being that dress code is something that can affect anyone on any given day, implies that it plays a large role in the learning environment that policies create in schools.

Passing Int. 0118 will allow information-sharing on the realities of what is going on in schools and the impact of dress code policies on students. Open communication on dress code policies and the consequences of disparities in representation and reporting will allow policies to be more accessible and equitable. Additionally, passing Res. 0292 will holistically alter the way we view

¹ Duchesneau, Nancy & Onyeka-Crawford, Adaku, & Patrick, Kayla. (2020). "...and they cared": How to Create Better, Safer Learning Environments for Girls of Color. The Education Trust. Available at:

https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/And-they-cared_How-to-create-better-safer-learning-environments-for-girls-of-color_Aug-2020.pdf.

² Blake, Jamilia & Butler, Bettie Ray & Lewis, Chance & Darensbourg, Alicia. (2011). Unmasking the Inequitable Discipline Experiences of Urban Black Girls: Implications for Urban Educational Stakeholders. *The Urban Review*. 43. 90-106. 10.1007/s11256-009-0148-8.

the impacts of dress code on our students. Inclusivity is important when addressing disproportionate outcomes related to disciplinary action in schools. The truth is, implicit bias, exclusionary policies and subjective enforcement keep students out of the learning environment and hinder their success in schools. Alignment in teacher training across district schools is a huge step towards bridging the gap between diverse bodies, cultures, gender expressions and school regulations.

While I am not currently a student of the NYC public school system, I can speak on the experience I have working with students and the knowledge I have gained researching the intersections of race, class, and gender on Black girls in schools for my graduate thesis paper. The lived realities of identifying as a femme of color comes with stereotypes, adultification, sexualization, harassment, and closer surveillance which pose lifelong consequences for young femmes of color.

Specifically, sexism, adultism, misogynoir, xenophobia, and racism all intersect with the experiences of marginalized students, especially for Black girls and gender-expansive young people of color.

I feel saddened as a young Brown woman who witnessed similar consequences of exclusion in her own school growing up and can only hope for a better future for Black and Brown girls.

School should be a place where we foster the inner genius of our students and grant them expression and autonomy over their lives as young people and important members of our society. In order to do this, we need more explicit and less subjective policies that students, parents, and school personnel are all aware of to better integrate the community involved. My ultimate recommendation is for the New York City Council to pass the two dress code related bills—**Int. 0118 and Res. 0292**— to create safer and more supportive learning environments for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: Jasmina Salimova
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and the Members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Jasmina Salimova, and I am a part of the Young Women's Advisory Council (YWAC) program at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE).

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around gender-based violence and ending school pushout for close to two decades. I am offering testimony today because I want to make sure young people, such as myself, feel confident and safe in their clothing and self expression and also acknowledge the blatant racism, body discrimination and misogyny behind dress codes. I support passing both [Int. 0118-2024](#) and [Res. 0292-2024](#) to make sure that there is a system in place to hold schools accountable in their implementation of dress code policies and to ensure that dress codes are inclusive of diverse cultures, bodies, gender expressions, and sexual orientations.

In middle school, my first introduction to dress codes came when my friend who had a curvier body type was dress coded for wearing a tube top. This confused me, because other girls in my school did not get in trouble for their tube tops or tank tops; the only difference was their bodies. That's when I started realizing that the dress code targeted students with specific body types.

Later on, in high school, I was sitting in gym class once when my Latina friend walked in with an oversized, wrinkled, school branded shirt upset that she had been dress-coded for her low-cut top. White girls in my school with similar body types were wearing the same tops but were not subjected to the same level of punishment by school staff. The racist double-standard was clear. The gendered double-standard also became clear, too, because the only time I have ever witnessed or heard of a boy getting dress-coded was when my male peer took off his shirt in the lunchroom and only put it back on after he got dress-coded. Additionally, I have heard countless complaints from my peers about unsettling interactions with male teachers, and all instances of the dress code enforcement were carried out by female staff in my school. Given such discriminatory applications, it must be the case that dress codes are not protecting students, especially not young women, but rather protecting instructors.

Because of these experiences, I avoid dressing the way I want to in order to avoid the harsh and humiliating punishments that may come with being dress-coded. To address this, I ask that both Int. 0118 and Res. 0292 be passed. I also ask that before developing a new dress code or reexamining an existing one, schools should consult with their School Leadership Team, parents, and various members of the student body in order to ensure that different perspectives and identities are considered and respected.

Jennifer Nunez



New York, NY, 10040

6/21/2024

To whom it may concern:

Last year in fourth grade, Luna was pulled aside by a teacher and informed that her biker shorts violated the school dress code because they were too form-fitting and distracting to boys. Over the summer, she told me that many girls were similarly reprimanded, with frequent stories of dress code enforcement against girls but not boys. When I asked Luna if any boys were dress-coded, she said it was only the girls, highlighting that even children noticed the policy targeted girls.

In fifth grade, during ballroom dance rehearsals, Luna felt uncomfortable dancing with boys and asked her teachers if she could instead dance with a girl friend. Her teachers refused, stating that in ballroom dancing, girls must dance with boys and boys with girls.

Later that year, I received a flyer for the end-of-year formal dance that listed restricted items like spaghetti straps and shorts, which are typically worn by girls. When I questioned the principal about why the restrictions mainly applied to girls' clothing, she claimed the policy was gender-neutral and meant to ensure safety and comfort for all students.

I pointed out that Lunas dress for the dance was a spaghetti strap style. The principal suggested that luna wear a sweater over it. The principal's suggestion that she wear a sweater was impractical and even absurd, given that it's the peak of summer. Wearing a sweater could make her uncomfortably hot and potentially unsafe. The principal insisted Luna would be comfortable with a sweater since she insisted the school was cold. She ignored my concerns and offered no resolution.

I am seeking a to raise awareness to this issue and seek a fair resolution and acknowledgment that the dress code at PS 178 is discriminatory, targeting girls rather than being gender-neutral.

Jennifer Nunez



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: Natalie Henry
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and the members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Natalie Henry, and I am a part of the Speakers' Bureau program at Girls for Gender Equity.

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around gender-based violence and ending school pushout for close to two decades. I am offering my testimony today in support of [Int. 0118-2024](#) and [Res. 0292-2024](#) because it is a common experience for women and girls to be fair subject on what they wear, and if my testimony can lead to the safe exploration of style and gender expression for future generations, then I'd like to contribute.

Of course, there are some valid intentions behind the creation of dress codes, but their enforcement has unfairly targeted and victimized young women.

I didn't know about the term "dress code" until middle school, when I noticed peers in school were getting tapped for wearing certain things like tank tops, skirts, shorts, or crop tops. There wasn't a clear dress code policy, though, so its enforcement seems to come from school staff members' own unpredictable, personal, and sometimes, biased opinions. The dress code was enforced so frequently, and so often arbitrarily, that a silent protest took place in which students (mainly female) began intentionally wearing the items that one would customarily get dress coded for. Our school was close-minded in

terms of creative pursuits, hence their rejection of students' creative expression.

The lack of creative exploration and expression caused me to leave that school for another school that valued creativity and individuality in both the staff and student body.

In conclusion, if dress codes seek uniformity, then such policies should be enforced uniformly. Dress code standards must apply to all genders, races, and bodies fairly. That is why I believe a system for holding schools accountable for their dress code policies is necessary and why I am advocating for Int. 0118 and Res. 0292 to be passed today.

I am writing to offer an opinion on dress codes and uniforms in New York City Public Schools.

I believe that both dress codes and uniforms are not a good fit in the public school setting for 2 reasons.

First is the prohibitive cost of uniforms and dress code specific clothing. I grew up in New York City and during the few years I had to wear a uniform in school they were very expensive and my parents could not afford them. As a result, I wore ill-fitted hand me downs that absolutely marked me as a poor kid.

My children attend public schools where there is a dress code and a uniform policy, respectively. Uniforms and the correct clothes to match dress code are still expensive decades later. I understand rules such as: "no offensive language" or "comfortable shoes only" but as far as I am concerned, parents should be able to choose clothes their kids can wear any day of the week that they can find on sale or for free – not from an expensive uniform store. All families and especially low-income families should not be expected to bear the burden of cost of uniforms or dress-code specific clothing. Especially when economically disadvantaged students make up 72.8 percent of the population.

I am also concerned about the wording of dress codes – and the lack of oversight. A month ago, my daughter's elementary school has started adding to the dress code with clothing restrictions that directly target the female students. The new dress code prohibits "spaghetti straps, crop tops, and short shorts, and bike shorts". My daughter wore shorts to school and was told "they were too short, she was showing too much leg, and it was distracting to the boys!" She is 8 years old. What century are we living in? my 8 year old should not be worrying about whether or not she is distracting boys at school – she should be learning math and reading.

I looked up the DOE policy on dress code and this kind of language that directly targets a gender is prohibited. Clearly there is no oversight on the DOE level.

I encourage the DOE to develop an oversight committee on dress codes and uniforms and consider abandoning all rules and regulations except ones that explicitly address safety in schools.

Sincerely,

Jeannine Jones
District 6 NYC Public School Parent



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: Rayna Young
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and the Members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Rayna Young, and I am an alumni of the National Agenda for Black Girls Steering Committee at Girls for Gender Equity. I also recently graduated with a Master's Degree in Public Policy, and GGE was the partner organization for my capstone project.

With their support, I produced a research report entitled *Dress Codes, Pushout, and Self Expression: An Examination of New York City Public Schools*, where I did a qualitative review of over 100 school dress codes policies from all five boroughs, and assessed them based on their adherence to the Department of Education guidance and other criteria of note (see Appendix A). I developed my own evaluation system and rubric, because I noticed that the Department of Education (DOE) did not have any reporting metrics to accompany the guidance that they issued on dress code policies. While it is evident that the department values inclusivity, the absence of an accountability structure for schools leaves much to be desired in practice. I found that a significant percentage of dress code policies are not publicly available online. In our sample of the 128 secondary schools that reported suspending at least one student for dress code violations between 2021-2023,

only 68 schools had digitally accessible dress code policies. This is gravely concerning, as DOE has suspension data, but not data regarding the language used in the policies themselves, and there is no way to assess if the school's policy met the DOE expectation of gender-neutral, culturally-competent dress codes.

Passing [Int. 0118-2024](#) and [Res. 0292-2024](#) is a crucial step in making the inclusive school environment that the DOE outlined in their guidance, a reality. This reporting mechanism will not only encourage schools to uphold the standards of the DOE when it comes to dress codes, but can also promote collaboration and sharing of best practices among schools. In my review, I found some inspiring examples of schools explicitly stating that they value students' ability to express themselves as a tenet of their dress code policies. While schools are environments for learning, they are also an arena for young people to develop a sense of self and exist in a safe space. It is up to the adults to foster that environment, and to take action to preserve it in the face of adversity.

With that being said, I urge the committee to pass Int. 0118 and Res. 292, in order to protect and uplift the stories you have heard from the youth present today, and thousands of other students who are your future constituents. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Appendix A

*Dress Codes, School Pushout and Self-Expression: An Examination of New York
City Public Schools*

Rayna Young

Jess Anderson

PLCY 992

Dress Codes, School Pushout and Self-Expression: An Examination of New York City Public
Schools

May 3, 2024

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I. Executive Summary

This research explores school dress code policies in New York City Public Schools and their impact on the self-expression of female and non-binary students, in partnership with Girls for Gender Equity. In response to the New York City Department of Education issuing guidance in favor of gender neutral, culturally competent dress code policies, Girls for Gender Equity, my partner organization, wanted to release a third edition of their Suspending Self-Expression report. The report draws connections between school dress code policies, the self-expression of young people, and school pushout, and the research done here will inform the upcoming edition. I designed a criteria and evaluation system to determine if schools had accessible dress code policies that adhered to the Department of Education guidance and other criteria of note.

Through a qualitative review of handbooks from a sample of schools, I found that a significant percentage of dress code policies are not publicly available online. Many policies that were available are not reflective of current trends and feature shaming or subjective language. Additionally, I found that the borough that scored the lowest on the criteria is the one with the highest population of people of color. My recommendations include passing legislation to require gender-neutral dress codes, and passing legislation in the New York City Council requiring the Department of Education to post dress codes online and report on the number of dress-code related out-of-school suspensions annually.

II. **Background**

My capstone partner is Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), a non-profit organization in New York City whose mission is to “work intergenerationally, through a Black feminist lens, to center the leadership of Black girls and gender-expansive young people of color in reshaping culture and policy through advocacy, youth-centered programming, and narrative shift to achieve gender and racial justice.” GGE offers programs to youth of color that involves community organizing training, public speaking experience, and support for young people who are justice-impacted or survivors of sexual violence. GGE has four policy verticals including Education Justice, where they work to eliminate school pushout for Black youth. School pushout is defined as “systemic factors that prevent or discourage young people from remaining on track to complete their education” (Education 2022).

In 2017, GGE published a memo about school dress code policies and the ways that they contribute to school pushout called “Suspending Self-Expression: Punishing Girls of Color in New York City Schools Through School Dress Code Enforcement.” They followed this report up in 2021, with interviews from students and analysis of dress code policies in New York state, excluding the counties that make up the 5 boroughs of New York City. My research continues this work, but on a smaller scale looking at just New York City public secondary schools. The policy question I am researching is **“How do dress code policies in public secondary schools in New York City affect the self-expression of their female and non-binary students?”**

III. **Problem Statement**

The role of dress code policies in schools has evolved over the past few decades as scholars have examined the potential for bias and discrimination. A study from the federal

Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 90% of school dress codes prohibit at least one clothes item that is “feminine,” compared to 70% of schools banning a stereotypical “masculine” item or method of wearing clothes (U.S. 2022). These discrepancies aren’t just evident in the policies themselves, but also in their subjective enforcement within schools. A study published earlier this year found that adolescent girls across the country reported being objectified while being punished or found in violation of their school’s dress code (Lim 2024). Racial and ethnic minorities are also affected by this phenomenon. Many scholars cite strict school dress code policies as an attempt to uphold a standard of appropriate dress rooted in whiteness and upholding an image of professionalism that is separate from the student’s cultural backgrounds (Aghasaleh 2018, Rogers 2022). School pushout begins with the differences in discipline rates as a study done by the Georgetown Center for Poverty & Inequality in the 2017-18 school year found that Black girls are 4 times as likely to get suspended and expelled from school as white girls (Georgetown 2020). The National Women’s Law Center noted that the increase in disciplinary action can lead to further negative implications including learning loss and criminal charges, as nationally Black girls make up more than one-third of all girls with a school-related arrest, despite representing only 16% of all female-identified students (2022).

These issues are also salient for queer youth, as dress codes that include a gender binary limit students who are transgender, non-binary, or questioning from wearing the clothing that makes them feel safe (Reddy-Best 2020). There are over 1 million U.S. adults who identified as non-binary as of 2021, and we can expect that number to increase (UCLA 2021). While there is not data available on youth, a rise in non-binary identity overall makes the issue of gendered dress codes more urgent, not just for school pushout reasons, but also because queer youth suicide rates has increased in recent years. The biggest concern for dress code policies is that if

discriminatory, they can negatively impact self-expression and push vulnerable populations out of school. In an attempt to address these concerns, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) issued guidance in 2022 that recommended schools use gender neutral language in dress code policies, and allow for culturally affirming clothing and hairstyles. However, the guidance is not required or enforceable and there is no metric of evaluating which schools chose to opt in. I built a framework for analyzing these school handbooks that will be outlined in the methodology section.

IV. **Methodology**

My original data collection plan was to analyze the school suspension data that is reported by New York City public secondary schools, looking at the distribution of grade level, race, and gender. Girls for Gender Equity submitted a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request to the New York City Department of Education for this information in December of 2023, and the request returned 128 schools, about 40% of the total public secondary schools, including charter and magnet schools (NYC 2023). However, the department redacted data from schools that reported 5 or fewer suspensions in any category due to their interpretation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and desire to avoid sharing the personally identifiable information of the students. There were only seven schools that had comprehensive data after the redactions, so I did not use that data as a means of gathering information; though, the lack of transparency of information will be a point of discussion in the Recommendations section of my report. I will be using the names of 128 schools to serve as a sample and do an audit of their dress code policies and determine if they are in alignment with the Department of Education's gender-neutral guidance issued in 2022, and criteria from the previous Suspending Self-Expression Report. Evaluating schools that have suspended students in the past 2 years for

violating dress code supports GGE’s to determine if dress code policies are contributing to school pushout. Additionally, the selection of secondary schools as opposed to other grade levels is because students of that age range are often developing a sense of style, dressing themselves, and having access to social media, which could all influence their self-expression.

We scraped the school and district websites and emailed school administrators to locate the written policies. I provided a score to the schools based on their ability to meet the six criteria (Accessibility, Identity Affirming Hair/Clothes, Gender Neutrality, Trends, Clothing Length, Subjective Language), with more detail available in Appendix 1. I also created a rubric of evaluation to rate the schools, and each borough was given a letter grade based on how many schools complied with the criteria. For the rubric, I wanted to create a scale where A-C represents 50-100% alignment with standards, and less than 50% is D and F, instead of the normal 7 or 10-point distribution. In my evaluation of the boroughs, I quoted the language that violated the standard, and that document is Appendix 7 of the report.

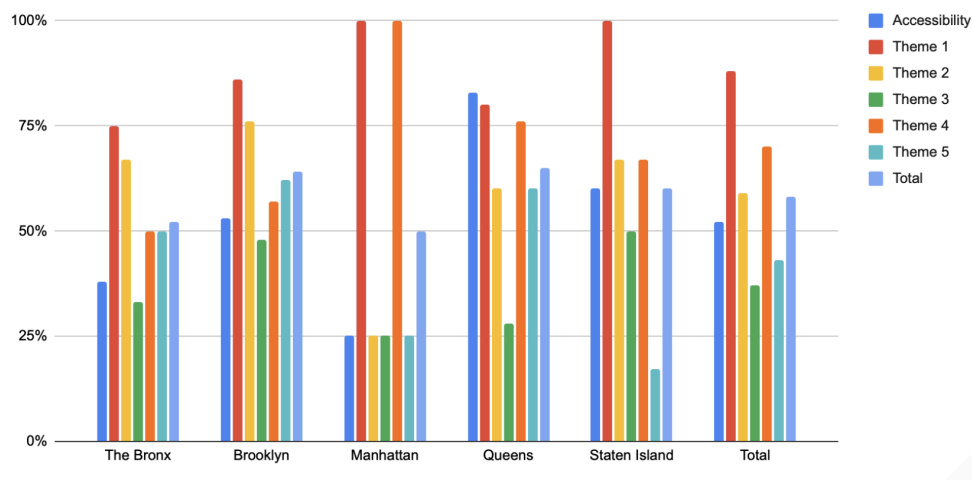
V. **Analysis**

The overall grades for the boroughs were the following:

Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens	Staten Island
C (60%)	B (77%)	C (60%)	B (67%)	C (63%)

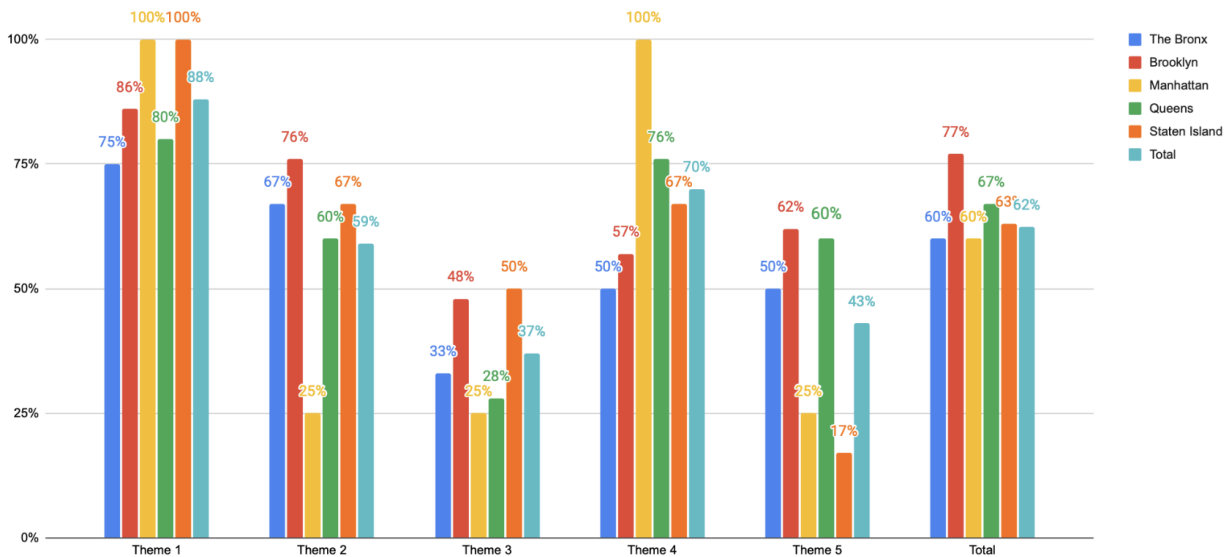
Brooklyn had the highest overall score by a sizable margin, and while the Bronx and Manhattan were tied, the former borough had more schools and therefore more infractions, so the Bronx was the lowest performing borough.

Dress Code Policies by Borough



The chart above features visualizations of the audit results by borough and shows that Theme 1 (Identity-Affirming Clothing and Hairstyles) had the highest compliance and Theme 3 (Strict Requirements for Popular Trends and Aesthetics) had the lowest. Notably though, there is great variance in terms of accessibility. About 55% of the overall sample had dress code policies available online, which is only 68 schools out of 128. The Bronx had $12/32= 38\%$; Brooklyn: $21/40 = 53\%$; Manhattan: $4/16= 25\%$; Queens: $25/30= 83\%$; and Staten Island: $6/10= 60\%$ accessibility. If the borough score were calculated out of the total numbers of schools, the results would be negatively skewed. In light of that, the borough scores for the themes are based on the schools that have policies.

Cross-Borough Policy Comparison by Theme



The above image (Appendix 4) has a cross borough comparison minus the accessibility metric, and you can clearly see the ranges of scores for Themes 2 and 4, which were often upwards of 50 points. It is clear that different boroughs use different language in their dress code policies, and the uniformity the NYCDOE hoped to foster has not yet been realized. There were common phrases that appeared across the boroughs though. One recurrent phrase spoke to the philosophy behind dress code policies: “In order to maintain a positive learning environment, it is expected that students dress in a professional manner. We require students to dress appropriately to ensure their safety and to keep the focus on teaching and learning.” Most of the repeated phrases were negative: Prohibiting Crocs, ripped jeans, sunglasses indoors and “Clothing that does not provide coverage of torso, undergarments, and private body parts, including see-through garments of any kind.” It is unclear if this language came from the district or just became popular through informal sharing among school administrators.

In Appendix 5 you can see the breakdown of each borough's performance on the themes. The report card for Theme 1, about identity-affirming clothing and hairstyles, had the highest overall score of 88%, with two boroughs scoring 100%, and the lowest scoring borough—the Bronx— scoring 75%, the highest score for that borough in the entire audit. Theme 2 was slightly less successful, with Manhattan's score of 25% bringing the average down to 59% despite all of the other boroughs scoring 60% or above. Theme 3 was the lowest scoring overall, with no grades above 50%. The average score of all the boroughs was 37%. Strict requirements for popular trends and aesthetics was the focus of this theme, and it included policies like prohibiting shorts, leggings, and/or ripped jeans, and it also featured certain phrases that were capitalized, like a school in Queens that said “Black sneakers only (NO COLORS).” Theme 4 was about restrictions on the length and width of clothing, and the boroughs performed higher on this criteria. Manhattan had a perfect score, two boroughs had Bs, and the other two had Cs, which brought their overall score to a 70%. Theme 5 featured the lowest score from any borough, because Staten Island scored 17% in terms of shaming and subjective language, which is an F on our grading scale. That low score combined with three Cs and one D led to an overall citywide average of 43%.

I also looked at the highest and lowest performing boroughs overall (Appendix 6). Brooklyn's lowest score was in the high 40s, and it was one of the top three borough scores for every theme. The Bronx had a wide range of scores, but its highest score was a 75 which is not an A, even with my more lenient evaluation framework. In the policies for the Bronx I found gendered language, and vague phrases like “make sure [students] wear clothing that covers their body appropriately,” and “Hair should be neat and well-groomed.” Upon further exploring the Bronx I found that the county has more people of color and young people than New York City on

average, but has a higher poverty rate and lower high school graduation rate (Census 2022). More research will need to be done to determine if there is a correlation between the discriminatory policies and the county demographics to make conclusions about the role of dress codes in school pushout for marginalized students, but I hope this research lays a foundation for future scholars.

My summative takeaways from this audit are that dress codes, like policies in the legislative context, are making an argument about what the community values and what is appropriate. The policies were not written in neutral language, and often featured capitalizations and passive aggressive language. There is also a capitalistic element at play, as schools are dictating what clothing parents should purchase for their children in order to fit into the culture and learning environment. The policies in many cases reinforce a gender binary, and have the potential to diminish the self-expression of the students. In terms of evaluating if the schools are complying with the NYCDOE guidance, our reduced sample makes it difficult to generalize the results. A limitation of this work is that we don't know if schools that have public dress codes are more or less likely to comply with DOE guidance and encourage self-expression than the schools that we could not analyze. This illuminates the potential for bias if this analysis were to be extrapolated to a larger context.

VI. **Recommendations**

My recommendations involve legislative reforms to dress codes, but in the short-term I identified three best practices for school dress codes. The first one is that shorter dress code policies tended to have fewer violations of the criteria.

Positive Example

“Students are expected to dress neatly in comfortable clothes everyday. If the student has physical education, proper sneakers and exercise clothing are required. Gym uniforms are voluntary and are on sale at our GO store.”-- 121 (Staten Island)

The second practice is that schools with free dress should follow in the footsteps of schools with uniforms, as their dress code policies tend to be more straightforward. In the schools that had uniform policies, they were more restrictive in what could be worn, but less targeted in terms of gender or racial bias in their language.

Positive Example

“Students are expected to be in uniform every day. Uniform checks are conducted daily. Shirts: short sleeve maroon polo shirt and/or long sleeve maroon polo shirt. Pants/shorts/skirt: Black or khaki. Not part of the uniform: t-shirts, jeans, sweatpants. colored hoodies or sweatshirts. ugg slippers, slides, crocs, sandals, flip-flops. baseball hats or hooded sweatshirts.”-- 95 (Queens)

The last practice is that policies should state the value of self-expression for young people. There is precedent for this as a school in Brooklyn named self-expression as a key principle behind their dress code. Brooklyn was the borough with the highest overall grade and this kind of consideration of the desires of young people can serve as a model for other jurisdictions.

Positive Example

“At [school name] our goal in establishing dress expectations are: to balance self-expression with working comfortably and appropriately in school to communicate school and DOE guidelines around unacceptable attire”-- 45 (Brooklyn)

My first policy recommendation is for the NYCDOE to expand the guidance they issued in 2022 to include a mandate and evaluation structure. As currently written, the guidance has no enforcement power or publicly available evaluative metrics to determine if it is being implemented. There are no incentives or deterrents in place, and no framework for evaluation, so the Department is not currently tracking which schools have adopted the policy. In my analysis, I found that schools were better at adhering to the DOE guidance [Themes 1 (85%) & 2 (65%)] but there was still not ideal compliance. If the NYC DOE values gender-neutral, culturally competent dress code policies, they should move beyond guidance and codify them in their schools. There is precedent for this, as New York passed the Student Bill of Rights in 2015, and violations are enforceable by law (NYC 2015). There are also legislators working on this issue.

My final recommendation is for the New York City Council to pass the two dress code related bills currently being deliberated on. The first piece of legislation is called [Int. 118](#), and it would require an annual report from DOE to Council on the accessibility and content of dress code policies in New York City Public Schools, and also about the quantity of disciplinary infractions incurred in violation of the dress code suspension statutes. This bill was proposed by Councilwoman Diana Ayala in February of 2024 and has not moved since it was placed in the Education Committee at the meeting where it was introduced. The second bill, [Res. 292](#), would

call on the NYC DOE to implement a city-wide gender neutral dress code and other inclusive measures. This bill was proposed by Councilwoman Althea Stevens in March of 2024, and she has collaborated with several advocacy groups on the text. GGE is named explicitly in the legislation, and this research could be a part of the lobbying efforts to push this legislation forward, as it also has not moved since it was placed in the Education Committee.

VII. **Opportunities for Future Research and Conclusion**

There are several opportunities for future research on this topic. First, GGE has submitted another FOIL request for information on suspension data due to dress code violations in NYC. This was the original project scope, and I believe examining the data aggregated by race and gender would provide quantitative support for this analysis. Looking beyond New York, future researchers could use the criteria outlined in this paper to do analyses of other populous cities, and even states for a national comparison. On the federal level, it would be interesting to look at the influence of the U.S. Department of Education and what resources they could leverage to implement gender-neutral, culturally competent dress codes.

In conclusion, this sample reflects that New York City Public Schools are suspending students for dress code violations that are largely not publicly available. In the schools that do have policies online, the data showed that over 50% of them feature shaming and subjective language or strict requirements for popular trends, which may have negative implications on students' self-expression. Additionally, the borough that scored the lowest is the one with the highest population of people of color, but future research would be needed to suggest a correlation between that phenomenon and the findings in this paper. I recommend passing local and state-level legislation to require dress code accessibility and policies that are gender-neutral

and culturally competent in order to support the self expression of secondary school students in New York City Public Schools.

VIII. **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank GGE for partnering with me on this work and the policy team for devoting time and resources to supporting me in this research. I would like to specifically thank Quadira Coles, Ella Grace Downs, Bishop, Eman Gad, and Damala Denny. I would like to thank my capstone advisor Jessica Anderson for her support, and The Odum Institute at UNC for their expertise. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, friends and classmates for their encouragement throughout this process.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Handbook Audit Analysis Criteria

- Accessibility- Was the dress code policy available online?
- Theme 1- Dress codes must not prohibit clothing, headwear, or hairstyles that affirm or are consistent with a student's identity
 - Examples from the policy
 - Head scarves
 - Do-rags
 - Beads and other hair accessories
 - Length of hair (short or long)
 - Locs
 - Braids
 - Twists
 - "Unnatural hair" like wigs or extensions
- Theme 2- Dress codes must have gender neutral, uniformly applied language. This may include prohibiting a specific gender from wearing particular attire, or prohibiting certain types of clothing that is stereotypically associated with one gender.
 - Examples from the policy
 - Prohibiting students who identify as male from wearing skirts, jewelry, or nail polish;
 - Requiring only students who identify as male to wear neck ties for yearbook photos; or
 - Requiring only students who identify as female to wear dresses at graduation.
 - Prohibiting miniskirts or camisole tank tops, which are predominantly worn by students who identify as female.
 - Our Additional Criteria (from previous report)
 - Exposed Midriffs
 - Plunging Necklines
 - Halter Tops
 - Tube Tops
 - Spaghetti Straps
 - Language around Breasts or Cleavage
- Theme 3- Strict Requirements for Popular Trends and Aesthetics
 - Jewelry
 - Undergarments
 - Nails
 - Make-up
 - Hairstyles
 - Specific Bags/Bookbags (Telfar, totes, etc)

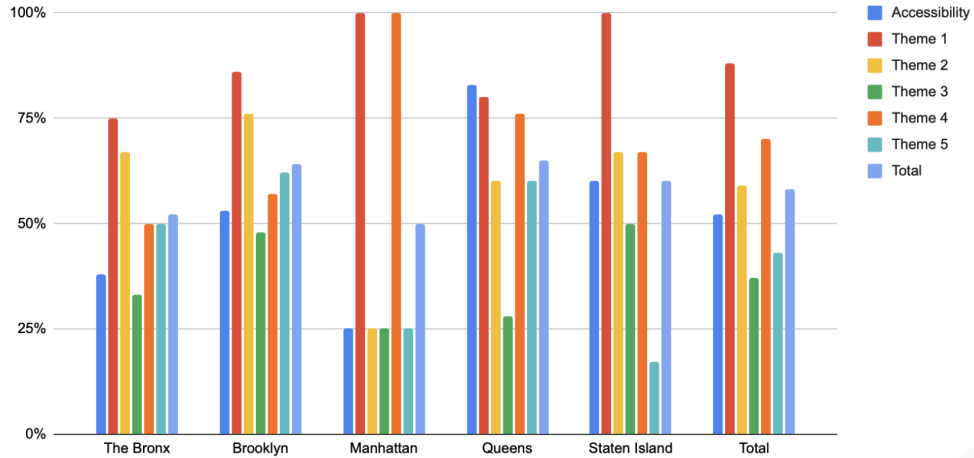
- Theme 4- Length and width of clothing
 - Strap Thickness
 - Skirt/Dress Length
 - Short Length
- Theme 5- Shaming and Subjective Language
 - “Interferes”
 - “Modest”/”Immodest”
 - “Inappropriate”
 - “Disruptive”
 - “Cleanliness”
 - “Revealing”
 - “Distracting”
 - “Excessive”
 - Discretion/Staff Authority to Decide
 - In reference to punishment
 - “Professionalism”
 - Other
 - In the previous report, included terms like risque, skimpy, skintight, mentions of embarrassment, etc.

Appendix 2- Rubric for Evaluation

	A (5 points)	B (4 points)	C (3 points)	D (2 points)	F (1 points)
Accessibility of Dress Codes Online	85% or more of the schools meet the standard	Between 65-84% of the schools meet the standard	Between 50-64% of the schools meet the standard	Between 25-49% of the schools meet the standard	Less than 25% of the schools meet the standard
Identity Affirming Hair/Clothes	85% or more	65-84%	50-64%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Gender Neutral	85% or more	65-84%	50-64%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Trends	85% or more	65-84%	50-64%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Clothing Length	85% or more	65-84%	50-64%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Subjectivity	85% or more	65-84%	50-64%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Total	A: 26-30 pts	B: 21-25 pts	C: 16-20 pts	D: 11-15 pts	F: 6-10 pts

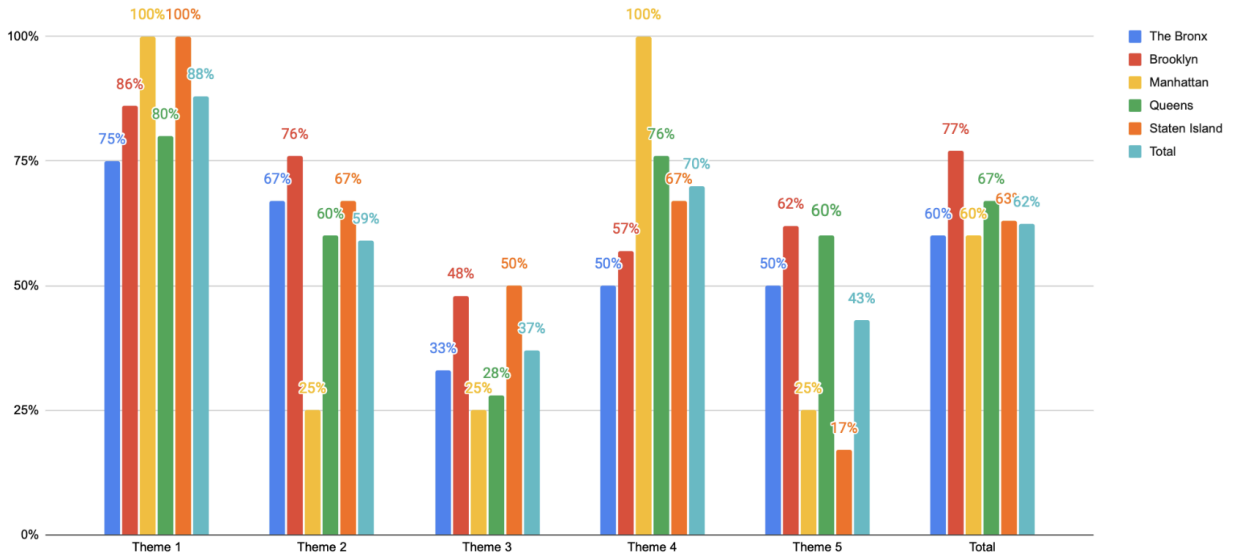
Appendix 3

Dress Code Policies by Borough



Appendix 4

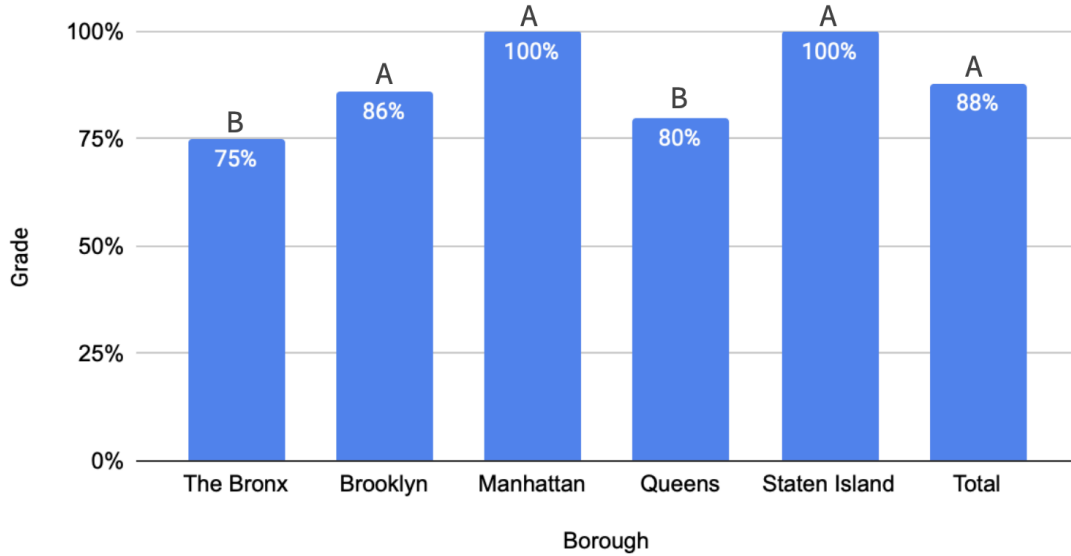
Cross-Borough Policy Comparison by Theme



Appendix 5(A-E): Handbook Analysis by Theme

Theme 1 Results by Borough

Dress codes must not prohibit clothing, headwear, or hairstyles that affirm identity.



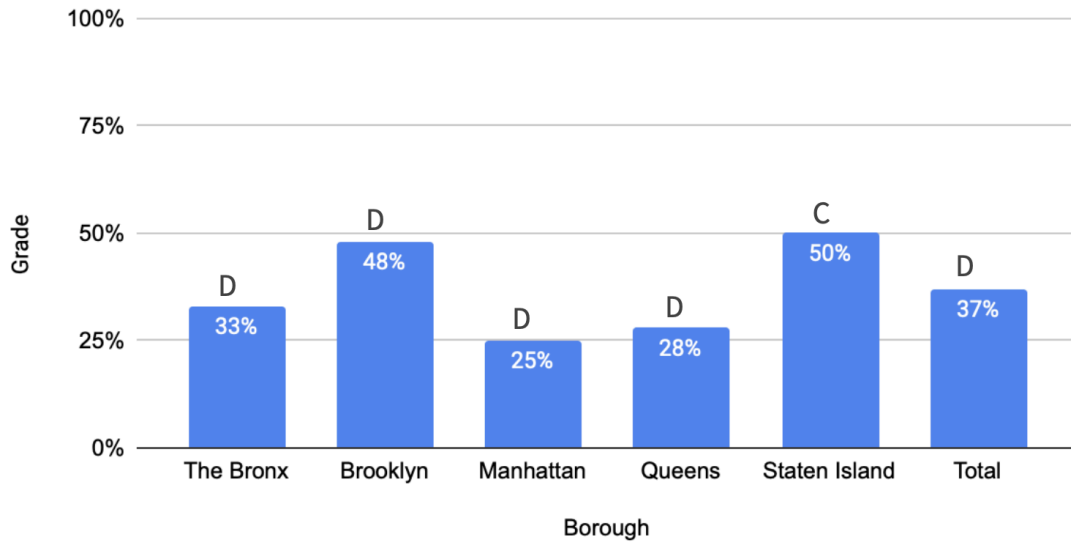
Theme 2 Results by Borough

Dress codes must have gender neutral, uniformly applied language.



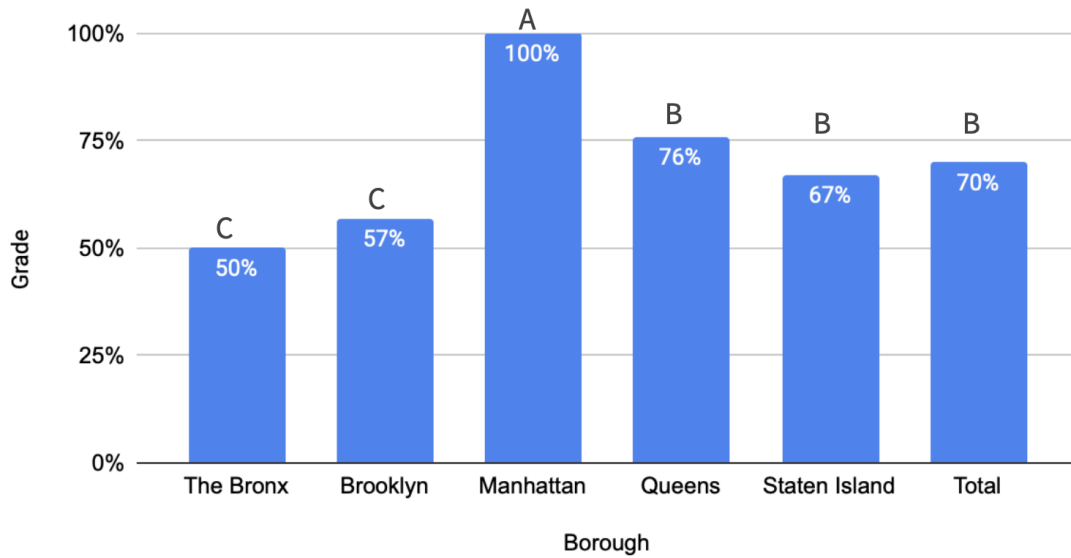
Theme 3 Results by Borough

Strict Requirements for Popular Trends and Aesthetics



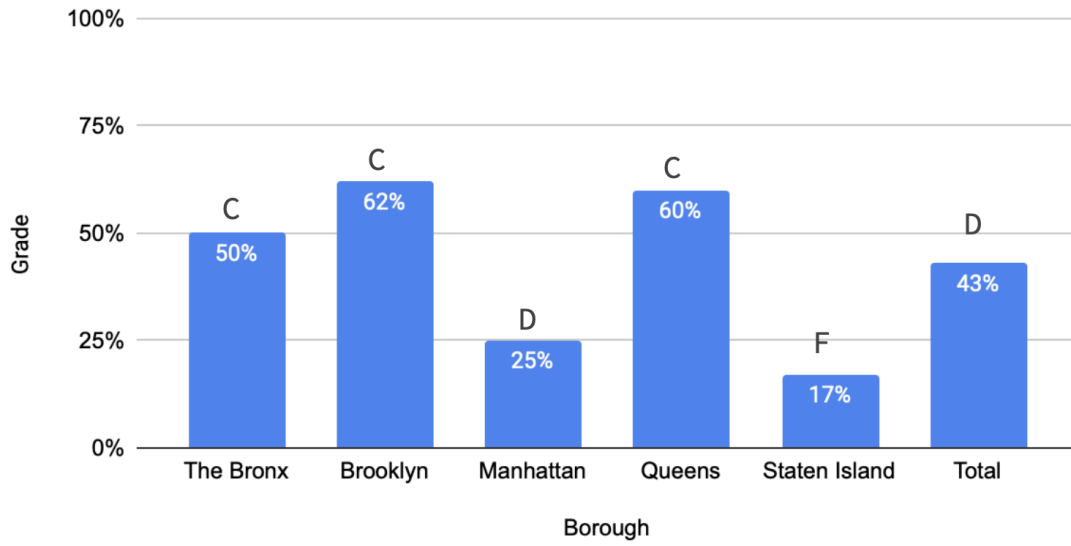
Theme 4 Results by Borough

Restrictions on length and width of clothing



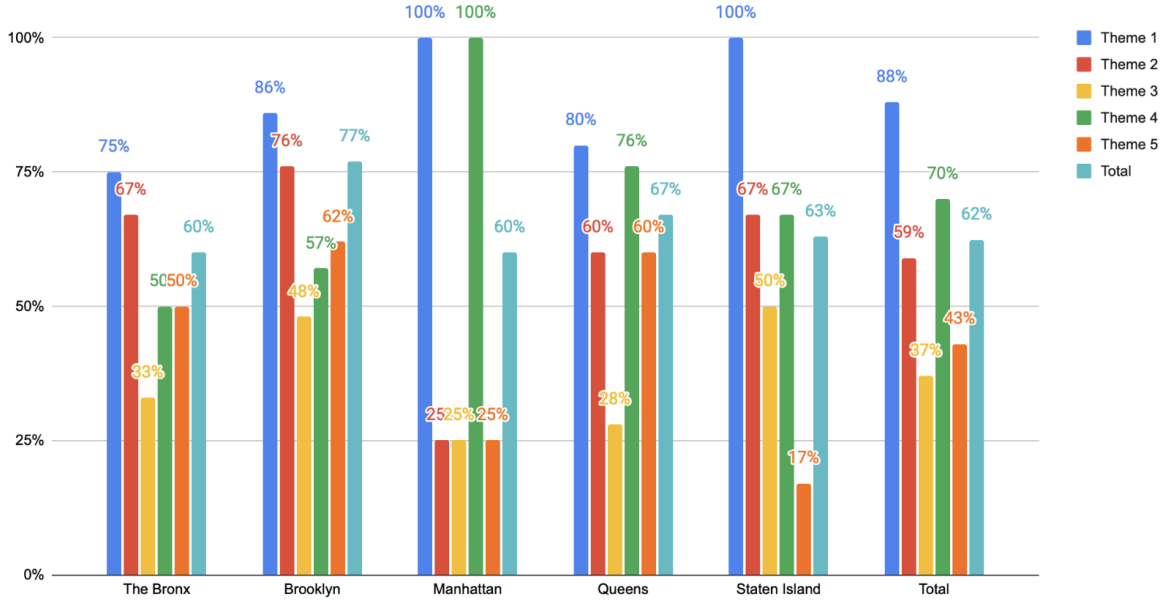
Theme 5 Results by Borough

Shaming and Subjective Language

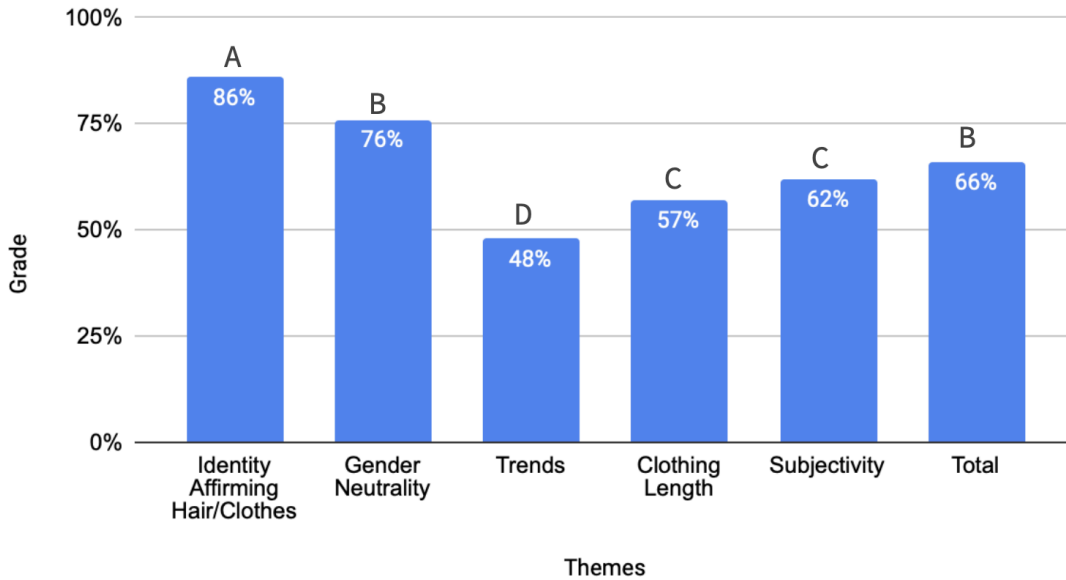


Appendix 6(A-C): Handbook Analysis by Borough

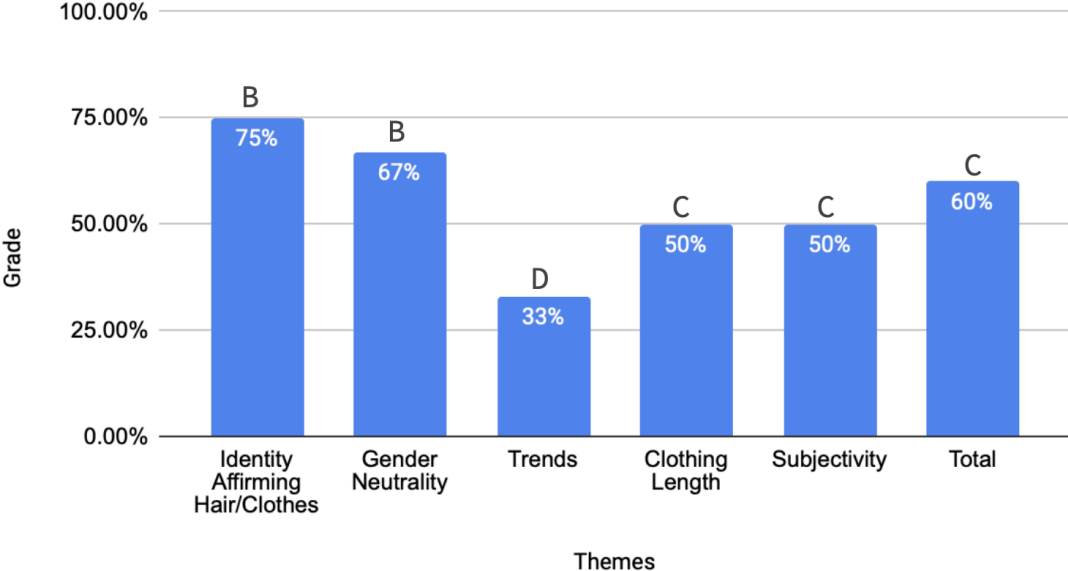
Cross-Theme Policy Comparison by Borough



Dress Code Report Card-- Brooklyn



Dress Code Report Card-- The Bronx



Appendix 7- External Links

- [Handbook Audit Analysis Criteria](#)
- [Handbook Audit Evaluation Forms](#)
- [Handbook Audit Sample and Dress Code Policies](#)
- [Handbook Audit Visualizations](#)

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**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

**Delivered by: S.
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and the Members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is S., and I am a part of the Young Women's Advisory Council program at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around gender-based violence and ending school pushout for close to two decades.

I am offering my testimony because I have been impacted by dress codes at my school. I attend a school with a uniform policy, and I've seen a lot of unfairness surrounding how dress codes are enforced. I've been dress-coded multiple times. The uniform policy doesn't take any personal style into consideration, making it difficult to express myself. The enforcement of dress codes is unpredictable since sometimes they are enforced strictly and other times not at all. Once, a teacher chased me around the school to dress-code me, even though I didn't need to wear the uniform that day. This has made me fearful of that teacher having personal bias towards me and how that will affect if I get dress coded in the future or not.

My school often claims to promote leadership and self-independence, yet enforces a strict uniform policy that makes us all wear the same clothes and colors. The cost of uniforms is another issue. Many students cannot afford them. I've seen a student stitch the school logo onto a polo shirt to meet the requirements.

When you get dress-coded, you are pulled out of class, asked why you're not in uniform, and sent to detention after school. The disciplinary measures seem to depend on the enforcing teacher or staff member's mood that day. The dress code is also not inclusive, especially for the large Muslim population at our school. Teachers also tend to dress code based on how "nice" an outfit looks. These experiences have created an uncomfortable atmosphere for me at school. I often feel anxious about whether what I'm wearing will get me dress-coded. Overall, the situation is unfair and upsetting, as there's no consistency in enforcement.

For solutions, I recommend involving the student council in writing dress code policies to ensure student representation. Uniforms should be made more affordable, and faculty should receive training to avoid cultural insensitivity and to acknowledge their own biases. I also recommend Council passing two bills: **Int. 0118-2024 and Res. 0292-2024**. These bills are really important to me as solutions to resolving the issues that occur as a result of unfair dress coding. The reporting required in these bills will create accountability and make sure that everyone has a clear definition of what is acceptable, which will promote equity across schools. Inclusivity in dress codes is also necessary to understand the different needs of each student.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Panel 2
Virtual

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

40

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Res Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Reda Talib

Address: _____

I represent: Individual

Address: _____

Panel 2
Virtual

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Heba Khalid

Address: _____

I represent: EMERGE USA

Address: _____

Panel 2
4

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Layla Hay

Address: _____

I represent: Asian American Federation

Address: _____



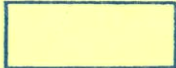
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3
Panel 2

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/19/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jayreet Singh

Address: _____

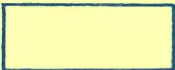
I represent: Khalsa Jodrol

Address: _____

Panel 2

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kulsoom Tapat

Address: _____

I represent: CACE (Coalition for Asian American Children & Families)

Address: _____

1
Panel 2

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ajitank Mascenali

Address: _____

I represent: Muslim Community Network on behalf of Armenian American Action Network

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

34

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0118-2024 Res. No. 0292-2024

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Akins Daniels

Address: [Redacted] New York

I represent: Trans formative Schools NY 10002

Address:

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0372

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophie Mada

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: NYC Youth Journalism Coalition

Address: 25 Broadway

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sahar Baki

Address: _____

I represent: YOUTH JOURNALISM COALITION

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0372

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aaqib Gondal

Address: _____

I represent: Youth Journalism Coalition

Address: 30 Ralph St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0372

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Camila Sosa

Address: _____

I represent: Youth Journalism Coalition

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0372

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Drew Oliver

Address: _____

I represent: Youth Journalism Coalition

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0372

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liza Greenberg

Address: _____

I represent: Youth Journalism Coalition

Address: _____

Panel 1

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

21

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Henry Goldschmidt

Address: _____

I represent: Interfaith Center of NY

Address: _____

Panel 1

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Harmeet Kambal

Address: _____

I represent: Sikh Coalition

Address: _____

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

Panel 1
**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: June 18th '24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yyra Takat

Address: _____

I represent: Muslim Students (Bronx Science School)

Address: _____

Panel 1
**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rev. Mark Towler

Address: _____

I represent: Tannenbaum Center

Address: _____

Panel 1
**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sanita Viswanath

Address: _____

I represent: Hindus for human rights

Address: _____

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

Panel 1

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0095

in favor in opposition

Date: 06/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Husein yafa barry

Address: _____

I represent: Muslim Community Network

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kleber Palma

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 95

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Henry Goldschmidt

Address: _____

I represent: Interfaith Center of NY

Address: 475 Riverside Dr, NY NY 10115

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Wollenberg

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kalina McKemie-Simms

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trevonda Kelly

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jolaa Nagi

Address: [REDACTED] NYCPS

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jay Ping

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adam Scheier

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Shea

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elaine Lindsey

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 432 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: George Patterson

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 771 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Kleber Kalina

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Public Schools

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robin Davison

Address: _____

I represent: NYCRS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0118 Res. No. 0292

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jasmina Salimova

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0118 Res. No. 0292
 in favor in opposition

Date: 18 Jun 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda Martinez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Part

Address: _____

I represent: Advocates for children of New York

Address: 151 W 30th St, 5th Fl, NY NY 10001

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 399 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan Johannesen

Address: _____

I represent: New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
(NYLPI)

Address: 151 W 30th Street, 11th Fl, NY NY 10001

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 118 Res. No. 292

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Isabelle Chow

Address: 66E NYC

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 118 Res. No. 292

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raky Sy

Address: 66E NYC

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 118 Res. No. 292

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eman Gad

Address: 66E NYC

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 118 Res. No. 292

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Quaddira Coles

Address: 66E NYC

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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