

Testimony of New York City Schools Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos: FY26 Preliminary Budget Before the NYC Council on Education

March 13, 2025

Introduction

Good morning and thank you Chair Joseph and Members of the Council Committee on Education for inviting me to testify about the Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget. I am New York City Public Schools Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos, and I am joined by First Deputy Chancellor Daniel Weisberg, Deputy Chancellor of Operations and Finance Emma Vadehra, and Chief Financial Officer Seritta Scott.

Progress and Commitments

As Chancellor of New York City Public Schools, I have the honor of serving over one million students and staff. This role is the culmination of my nearly two-decade career in education, which I began as a high school English teacher in 2007. Throughout my tenure in New York City Public Schools, as I moved into the roles of principal, deputy superintendent, acting superintendent, chief of staff, deputy chancellor, and ultimately, chancellor, I have aimed to be not only a leader but a changemaker, navigating times of crisis and pushing our schools to new heights.

When I became a principal, for example, only about a quarter of the senior cohort in my school was on track to graduate. I was determined to work in lockstep with my team and the school community to change that. By June, 66.7 percent of seniors had earned their diplomas. The following year, we raised that graduation rate to nearly 82 percent.

Then, in 2020, the pandemic struck, and I transitioned my school to remote instruction. Later I stepped up to serve at the district level as the deputy superintendent—and then acting superintendent—for Bronx high schools.

Around the time I joined our central team, we began to see a significant increase in the number of migrant students arriving in our city. I launched and led Project Open Arms, working across our department and other agencies to enroll and support tens of thousands of our newest New Yorkers and their families.

And as Chief of Staff to the former Chancellor, I was also one of the key architects of NYC Reads, which I immediately envisioned as a transformational initiative for our schools—in my own time as a high school English teacher and literacy specialist, I saw just how many of our kids struggled to read long into their teenage years.

As you can see, when I became Chancellor, I brought with me a breadth and depth of experience at nearly every level of our system. To this day, these experiences enable me to lead with a deep understanding of what it takes to build bold futures for our students. To me, the key ingredients are strong and clear instructional priorities—NYC Reads, NYC Solves, and Student Pathways, to be specific—bolstered by a foundation of safety and wellness, teacher support, and family and community partnership.

This morning I'd like to update you on the progress of these initiatives, starting with NYC Reads. I'm proud that we have successfully rolled out NYC Reads to our elementary schools and early childhood programs—but the work is far from over. As I know from my years in the classroom, research-based Tier 1 instruction *must* be paired with appropriate and effective Tier 2 and 3 interventions for students who are struggling or have different learning needs. That is why we have turned our focus to consistent, high-quality implementation and streamlined, targeted interventions. We are directing our schools to focus on a handful of proven strategies for supporting diverse learners, rather than leaving them to sift through hundreds of interventions on their own. This approach ensures that all children—including students with disabilities and multilingual learners—receive the support they need.

Through our investments in NYC Solves and Student Pathways, we are also ensuring that our older students have the real-world skills and experiences to thrive beyond high school. As New York State revises its graduation requirements and reconsiders what it takes to be prepared for adult life, we at New York City Public Schools are ahead by leaps and bounds. We have been reimagining the high school experience since the start of this administration, providing cutting-edge opportunities for our students to build strong plans for their futures and prepare for high-demand careers in technology, business, healthcare, education, and more.

In the largest school district in the nation, this work has impressive reach. I'm proud that over half a million students are benefiting from NYC Reads and NYC Solves this school year, and that 15,000 students are participating in our signature FutureReadyNYC program—gaining 21st-century skills and earning real wages. Across all Pathways programs, over 10 million dollars went into students' pockets last school year alone.

These instructional priorities are and will continue to be our major, long-term focus. Our goal is that by 2035, all students will be on grade level in reading and math, and that by 2030, 100,000 students will be in market-aligned pathways with access to paid work experience—and all students will graduate with a strong plan, enabled by college and career advising, career readiness skills, and access to early college classes. These goals are especially urgent given that only about half of our students are proficient in reading and math and that at the start of the Adams administration, only 27 percent of high school graduates were earning a bachelor's degree within six years of graduation.

But I am more confident than ever that we will get there. In part, this is because, as Chancellor, I have introduced three commitments to students, families, and staff—commitments that I believe are prerequisites for learning and will amplify the impact of our instructional work. They are:

- 1) Ensuring student safety and wellness;
- 2) Supporting educators; and
- 3) Empowering families and communities.

My first commitment is focused on safety and wellness, and by that I mean both physical and emotional well-being. We have a wide range of programs to meet this commitment, including our violence prevention program, Project Pivot; our mindfulness work in classrooms; our social workers and school counselors; our partnerships with community-based organizations; our school-based mental health clinics—we are adding 20 more this year; and our community schools.

We are also making sure to reaffirm both our values and our commitment to supporting all students and families. We've sent out communications to families about our supports for immigrant students and LGBTQ+ students, and we have reaffirmed our values to staff, encouraging them to continue their excellent work in our classrooms. We have reiterated—and will continue to reiterate—that none of our policies have changed. New York City Public Schools remains committed to protecting the right of every student to attend public school, regardless of immigration status, national origin, religion, or any aspect of their identity. We have also led extensive training sessions for principals, school counselors, school safety agents, and more on our long-standing protocols for access to our buildings. Additionally, we remain steadfast in our support for LGBTQ+ students, and in 2021, as just one example, we updated our guidelines on gender inclusion to enshrine this support in policy.

We recently held Respect for All Week and are currently celebrating Civics Week, both annual events that help us achieve our mission of building graduates with bold futures, prepared to be the leaders and changemakers of the next generation. We also continue to promote safety and civil discourse through our “Meeting the Moment” initiative. I’m proud to share that religious bias incidents in schools are down approximately 44 percent since this time last year.

My second commitment is to uplift our educators. Now that we have completed the initial launch of NYC Reads and NYC Solves, it is essential that we support our educators to implement these initiatives with fidelity, which is why we have provided unprecedented levels of professional development—we anticipate that by the end of June, NYC Reads and NYC Solves schools will have received a cumulative 18,500-plus days of coaching this school year. In partnership with the UFT and CSA, we have introduced flexibilities in response to educator feedback and are continuing to refine and enhance our implementation strategy; we refuse to leave our educators to sink or swim. To that end, we are investing in an additional year of job-embedded coaching and support for our NYC Reads educators.

My third commitment is to empower our parents, families, and communities. This has been fundamental to my work as an educator throughout my career, but it really came into focus for me after my daughter entered New York City Public Schools. I, as a parent who worked for our school system, still struggled to navigate it at times, and I realized how much further we must go to truly involve and empower our families. To that end, I announced our new Division of Family, Community, and Student Empowerment, and I also hosted a five-borough listening tour at the end of 2024 with over 1,000 students, families, staff, and community members in attendance. This month, we’ll be releasing a report detailing our findings from those listening sessions.

Relatedly, I have continued to champion programs that are beloved by families. For example, applications are already open for our incredibly popular academic- and enrichment-based Summer Rising program. I’m happy to share that our program evaluation recently revealed that Summer Rising 2024 had a statistically significant impact on stemming summer learning loss for K-8 students in math and K-2 students in reading. It especially impacted students in temporary housing and English Language Learners in both subjects and students with disabilities in math. As this analysis shows, at New York City Public Schools, we are building bold futures for our children year-round.

FY 2026 Preliminary Budget

Now, let me speak about our finances. Our Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget totals approximately \$41.2 billion, which includes \$33.5 billion in operating resources and another \$7.7 billion for education-related pension and debt-service funds.

We are grateful that there are no additional PEGs included in this proposed budget, and I want to thank the Mayor for backfilling critical stimulus-funded programs that would otherwise expire, such as Summer Rising and Learning to Work. City tax levy money is our largest source of revenue—projected to be 59 percent in FY26—and both the Mayor and City Council play an essential role in allocating these funds.

To that end, however, I want to be clear that we still face key financial challenges, including significant FY26 cliffs for stimulus-funded programs that have not been fully backfilled, such as early childhood education, and other gaps including due process cases, nursing, IT costs, and preschool special education classes, to name a few. Even funding for Summer Rising and Learning to Work, moreover, is only for FY26, and is not guaranteed in the outyears. While the city has invested in filling some of these gaps, it is critical to baseline these dollars to ensure we can provide all families with the appropriate programs and support that they need.

We also have major expenses looming on the horizon, most significantly compliance with the class size mandate. Currently, over 46 percent of classes are at or below the class size caps, well above the 40 percent requirement for 2024-2025, and we received well over 750 plans from schools for improving their compliance with the class size caps next year. We are reviewing these requests with the UFT and CSA, which include requests for hundreds of millions of dollars annually and the hiring of over 4,000 additional teachers—beyond our regular hiring—to achieve compliance next year. This funding and headcount are not currently in the Preliminary Budget.

As we grapple with this new and significant financial need, we are also faced with a proposed budget from the Governor that could severely impact our ability to serve the students and families of New York City.

Top on our list of concerns are the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula. While it's clear that the Foundation Aid formula needs a significant revision, the proposed changes would actually result in nearly 350 million *fewer* dollars to New York City Public Schools than we'd be entitled to under the current formula, making an already outdated and flawed formula even worse. The Governor has also proposed a statewide cell phone ban, a much-needed step, but one that requires increased funding to make it an effective and sustainable effort.

To address these challenges, I ask for this body's continued advocacy in regard to city, state, and federal education funding. As our partners in this work, your advocacy is critical in ensuring that our students and families get the resources and programs they need and deserve.

We especially want to make sure our city's educational priorities and fiscal needs are heard loud and clear by the lawmakers in Albany. On Foundation Aid, we ask that you urge the legislature to consider the changes we proposed last summer to the Rockefeller Institute of Government. These include updating regional cost metrics to better reflect the cost of living in New York City and updating and enhancing support for our high-needs students—such as students with disabilities who require access to highly specialized programs and our multilingual learners. If

we deliver this message clearly and consistently from across city government, I believe it will have an enormous impact.

Conclusion

In closing, I am committed to working hand-in-hand with our elected officials to build bold futures for our children. I want to thank the Council for its strong partnership and passionate advocacy. Thank you, Councilmember Dinowitz, for raising awareness around supporting students with IEPs, and thank you Councilmember Lee for recognizing the importance of having social workers in our schools. Thank you Speaker Adams, Chair Joseph, and Councilmember Gutierrez for your collaboration in ensuring quality services for our youngest learners in 3K and Pre-K. And thank you to the entire Council, and especially Speaker Adams and Chair Joseph, for your partnership in welcoming our newest New Yorkers through Project Open Arms. I feel fortunate to have collaborated with you even before I took on the role of Chancellor and to be able to continue that collaboration every day.

I look forward to answering your questions.



Testimony of the New York City School Construction Authority
on the Proposed FY2026 Preliminary Capital Budget
[NYCPS/SCA's February 2025 Proposed Amendment to the
FY2025-FY2029 Five-Year Capital Plan]
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

March 13, 2025

Nina Kubota, President & CEO, New York City School Construction Authority

Introduction

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and members of the City Council Education Committee. My name is Nina Kubota, and I am the President and CEO of the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA). I am joined by First Deputy Chancellor Daniel Weisberg and by Cora Liu, Vice President of Capital Plan Management for the SCA. We are pleased to be here today to discuss the updates to the NYC Public Schools (NYCPS)/SCA's FY2025-FY2029 Five-Year Capital Plan as laid out in the February 2025 Proposed Amendment.

Coming off of one of the biggest years in our history, we were proud to stand with NYCPS and many of you as we opened 24 new buildings this past September, adding over 11,000 seats to the public school portfolio.

But we didn't celebrate for too long. This September, we are opening an additional 6,363 seats across 13 buildings including the largest project we have ever built- a 3,066-seat high school on Northern Boulevard in Woodside, Queens.

I would like to take a moment to share a preview of what some of our other beautiful new buildings opening this fall will look like. Going clockwise from the top right, an addition at P.S. 105 in the Bronx, an addition at P.S. 26, Queens, an addition at P.S. 160, Queens, an addition at P.S. 5 on Staten Island, and a new school building located at 24 Shelley Avenue on Staten Island.

Since the adoption of our FY25-29 Five-Year Capital Plan, the total funding amount has increased by \$1.5 billion to \$20.5 billion which was largely due to funding rollover and new Reso A projects. We thank the City Council for their continuous support of our public schools.

I will now briefly discuss each of the categories of the proposed Amendment and the changes since the adoption of our 8th Capital Plan.



Capacity

The FY2025-29 Capital Plan has \$6.13 billion for New Capacity to create over 33,400 new seats citywide. New Capacity is the funding category that will be used for continued compliance with the Class Size law. 10,596 seats have already been sited in this new Plan- so we're already a third of the way there!

In our recently published February Amendment, the SCA is proposing to allocate nearly 7,100 seats for 15 new projects to specific districts and subdistricts- roughly 31% of the remaining unsited seats. While these projects do not actually have sites identified yet, they demonstrate where we think funds are the most needed under the class size law. In short, these districts and subdistricts represent areas where, after careful data analysis, we believe capital construction is needed to achieve class size compliance.

The balance will remain citywide in the Plan for other projects to be identified. This gives us, in partnership with NYCPS, the ability to respond effectively to address class size and allows us to provide targeted support to individual schools that are not located in areas receiving allocation but must rely on capital investment to achieve compliance.

The change to the New Capacity program that I just outlined was done as a response to the public feedback we received after publishing the original 8th Plan. As you can see from these maps, these are the 12 districts and subdistricts where we have allocated seats on a PS/IS level as well as on a borough level for the high school seats. We used the latest enrollment projections, housing development, as well as class size data to develop our proposed framework to allocate seats.

Building new capacity is, and will continue to be, done in a phased approach and will include a variety of different types of projects from new buildings to leased spaces and interior conversions in our existing buildings. In fact, three room conversion projects are underway now at Elmhurst Educational Campus and Far Rockaway High School in Queens, and at I.S. 101 in the Bronx. These projects represent 229 of the 6,363 seats that we are opening in September. These room conversion projects allow us to add capacity to existing school buildings and provide support in both a time and cost-efficient manner.



Overall, the Capacity Category totals \$6.98 billion, and its funding level remains unchanged from the adopted Plan. This category also includes \$400 million in Replacement funding which provides for the development of seats for schools that must be relocated. These seats are provided through new construction or alternative leasing opportunities, similar to new capacity. In this proposed Amendment, we have sited our first Replacement project for P.S. 106 in Far Rockaway, Queens.

Additionally, there is \$250 million associated with our programs to end our reliance on temporary structures. Out of the roughly 350 Transportable Classroom Units (TCUs) we started with, we have only 23 remaining at just 5 sites. In addition, there are 54 sites that have other temporary structures and 16 of them already have an identified removal plan.

With the Council's support, we have made huge strides in this area. We were happy to join Speaker Adams a few weeks ago as we celebrated the new addition at P.S. 96 in South Ozone Park that did three things for the school: It added additional capacity, it provided amenities such as a gymnasium, art room and music room that the school was previously lacking, and it will allow us to remove the TCU from the school's yard and turn it into a brand new playground.

Healthy Schools

We are already seeing a difference that the Healthy Schools Category is making across the NYCPS portfolio.

A majority of this funding, \$1.4 billion, will go towards our efforts to electrify our existing buildings. Additionally, there is \$350 million allocated to upgrade our heating plants. Both efforts will make huge strides in eliminating our reliance on polluting fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to our Plan funding, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) is anticipated to fund roughly \$200 million for electrification projects in FY25, with similar funding expected in FY26. With DCAS' partnership and additional funding, we anticipate being able to initiate over 40 electrification projects. In the last Plan, we awarded 13 electrification projects, and we are hoping to more than triple that in this Plan.



\$349 million is allocated to projects that will upgrade physical education facilities including athletic fields, pools, and playgrounds. We heard from the Council loud and clear that swim education is a top priority, and we couldn't agree more. We were proud to celebrate the opening of the restored pool at Beach Channel Educational Campus recently and we have worked with our partners at NYCPS, as well as nonprofit partners such as Asphalt Green, to ensure that kids across the city are able to have access to life saving swimming instruction. We are currently advancing seven pool projects to restore all non-operational pools so that they can be used in this vital effort.

The last program in this category provides \$180 million for Health and Nutrition projects. \$150 million of this funding will continue the successful implementation of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience initiative started in the prior Plan that transforms cafeterias into comfortable and attractive dining environments.

\$30 million is set aside for the creation of unique educational spaces with an emphasis on agriculture and nutrition. At our last hearing I spoke about the exciting project in Bergen Beach, Brooklyn where we built a 2-acre learning farm with support from Council Member Narcisse, but that is not the only farm project we have been growing. We will be providing a new building for the roughly 3.8-acre farm at John Bowne High School in Queens and I want to thank Council Member Gennaro for his generous support to this project. John Bowne has the largest high school agricultural program in the state, and it is only fitting that they have a facility that meets the caliber of their programming. The farm building, which has been designed in consultation with the Queens Zoo and under the guidance of national standards, will include an aviary to house various species of birds as well as a space for the school's reptile collection. In the end, the animals will be housed in a building more appropriate for their needs, and students will have a facility that is more conducive to John Bowne's programming.

Leading in Sustainable Design

At the intersection of the Capacity and Healthy Schools programs are the innovations we've championed in sustainable design. The former Saint John Villa (SJV) Campus on Staten Island has given us tremendous opportunity for exploring and implementing a multitude of sustainable design elements. We have taken advantage of as much of the campus as possible for solar panels, green roofs, and hybrid systems. Two parking lots on the campus will receive canopy solar systems, generating additional electricity and



providing shade. Based on preliminary design estimates, these systems are expected to generate about 500 kilowatts of electricity and save over 200 metric tons of carbon emissions annually. The solar panels will provide onsite energy generation which is especially important in all-electric buildings to reduce energy costs and strain on the electric grid. This campus is one of the biggest and most complex we have built in our history, and we thank Council Member Carr for his steadfast support of this project.

We are also excited to use a geothermal system and all-electric heat pumps for a majority of this campus. Geothermal systems take advantage of the near-constant temperature of the ground beneath the earth's surface and can act as a heat source in winter and a heat sink in summer, providing a highly efficient means of heating and cooling.

Huge strides have been made in geothermal systems, and we are beginning to pilot them where we can. We are also looking to include geothermal at the Forest Hills High School Annex which will provide class-size relief. We thank Council Member Schulman for her partnership on this important project.

Capital Investment

While we all love our new buildings, most of our buildings, roughly 86%, are over 30 years old and the average age is 75 years old. As such, our existing building portfolio still represents a significant area of investment for us.

The Capital Investment portion of the Plan includes two main categories: The Capital Improvement Program, or CIP, which totals \$3.43 billion and School Enhancement Projects totaling \$2.88 billion.

CIP includes exterior and interior building upgrades and other necessary capital repairs. These include life safety and security systems as well as critical components of a building's infrastructure such as roofs, parapets, and windows. One of our main priorities is to keep our buildings watertight to ensure the longevity of our building infrastructure. This work is vital so that we maintain the highest standards of safety at our school facilities for all students and staff. In the first year of this Plan, we are on track to award approximately 50 exterior modernization projects totaling over \$500 million.



School Enhancement Projects strengthen educational opportunities for our students. This category funds technology enhancements which includes continued data network improvements and bandwidth capacity, realignment of existing facilities to better suit instructional needs, bathroom upgrades, science labs, accessibility, the Career Connected Learning program, and other necessary improvements.

Accessibility

In this Plan, there is an increased funding level for accessibility, demonstrating the administration's continued commitment to expanding the accessibility of our school facilities. This plan allocates \$800 million towards making our buildings accessible.

For the FY2025-29 Capital Plan, we will build on the success of the previous Plan, continuing our focus on city-wide equity. In collaboration with our advocacy partners and other stakeholders, we have established new city-wide goals. We will prioritize projects that increase the accessibility of all primary school buildings across every district, raising the accessibility threshold from 33% to 40%. Additionally, NYCPS will focus on improving accessibility in District 75 schools across the entire city, aiming to ensure that 75% of those buildings are at least partially accessible, with 50% fully accessible.

Mandated

In the Plan, \$3.4 billion has been allocated for a number of items in our Mandated category for remediation, code compliance, and other projects required by local law. It also includes funding for wrap up insurance for contractors on our projects as well as for prior plan completion costs.

Conclusion

The SCA is incredibly proud of the work we are able to accomplish for NYC's public school students. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank the hard-working staff at the SCA that work tirelessly to provide high quality educational facilities across the city. We have already accomplished so much in the first year of this Capital Plan and have so much more that we are working towards.

I thank you again for allowing me to testify before you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

TESTIMONY

**NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
CHAIR, RITA JOSEPH**

*New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on
The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026*

**Presented on
Thursday, March 13, 2025**



**The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators
Henry Rubio, President
Dale Kelly, Executive Vice President
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Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, Chair Brannan, Chair Joseph, and the distinguished members of the City Council. I am Henry Rubio, the President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). On behalf of over 17,000 in-service and retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Educational Administrators, Supervisors, as well as Directors and Assistant Directors of Early Childhood Centers, thank you for this opportunity to provide our union's input on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Funding

We thank the city for their proposal of continuing support for Summer Rising programming, for their \$17.5 million proposed investment to expand the Pathways program to provide career readiness opportunities, and for pledging to support additional programs that help young New Yorkers, like Learning to Work and the development of a robust financial literacy curriculum. These investments will have a tremendous impact on the lives of students.

Last year, the city invested hundreds of millions in city dollars to preserve programs previously supported by expiring federal COVID relief aid. We applauded the city's commitment, and many of those programs require ongoing investment. With this year's budget, the mayor has not yet committed to renewing funding for 3-K in general, for specialized seats for preschoolers with disabilities or for extended-day preschool seats. Last year the city also invested in arts education, community schools, and restorative justice. We urge the city to recommit to this additional funding for these programs for Fiscal Year 2026. Our union has long advocated that spending cuts should never directly impact students. The city must find ways to replace the expiring federal aid so that our schools don't lose these meaningful programs.

The new administration in Washington DC has shared goals to dissolve the Department of Education and has already signed executive orders that impact school programs. We will work with all stakeholders to ensure that there is no reduction in federal funding for New York City schools and that all children have access to an equitable, high-quality education.

Career and Technical Education

CSA supports increased funding to Career and Technical Education programs. Our CTE programs are a game-changer for students, preparing them for in-demand careers while equipping them with real-world skills. School leaders know firsthand the impact of providing students with industry-aligned instruction and relevant work experience. We seek to give all our New York City Public Schools students access to career-connected learning, which must include modern youth apprenticeships and internships in high schools. Unfortunately, these programs remain underfunded and limited in scope, restricting access for many students who would benefit the most. CSA urges the city funding for CTE expansion to ensure that every student has access to a future-ready and future proof education.

Equally important is early exposure to digital fluency and computer science education in K-8 schools. With technology rapidly shaping the job market, students must develop foundational skills in coding, computational thinking, digital literacy, and artificial intelligence from an early age. Expanding access to high-quality computer science programs in elementary and middle schools

will ensure that students are equipped to succeed in an increasingly tech-driven world. CSA strongly advocates for dedicated funding, professional development for educators, and equitable access to devices and curriculum resources so that all students—regardless of zip code—can build the digital skills necessary for success in high school, college, and beyond. Our workforce is evolving and so our schools must keep pace.

STEAM Centers—specialized hubs where students gain hands-on experience in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math—play a crucial role in preparing students for emerging industries. These centers expose students to cutting-edge fields such as robotics, coding, and design, providing invaluable skills for the workforce of the future. We urge the city to invest in expanding STEAM Centers across all boroughs and ensure that every student, regardless of neighborhood, has access to these critical learning opportunities.

Community Schools

CSA also support increased investment in Community Schools, which provide essential wraparound services for students and families in disadvantaged communities. When paired with robust CTE programming, these schools become powerful engines of economic mobility, ensuring that every student regardless of background graduates with a pathway to college or a well-paying career.

Budget Appeal Funds

In addition, as we advocated for last year, the DOE must ensure an adequate budget appeal pool of funds to effectively support schools during the budget appeals process. Finally, the city must also continue to fund the purchase and repair of student devices. Our system's dependence on these tools escalated with the pandemic and now includes their utilization for testing and more; we must not allow the expense of these tools to become an unfunded mandate for schools.

Funding for Class Size Law Implementation

We believe in smaller class sizes. School leaders know firsthand the positive effects that smaller classes can have on students. Anyone who has ever stepped foot in a classroom can understand how reducing students in a classroom can result in more individual attention and feedback for each, better connection between teachers and students, and more meaningful participation in lessons.

However, from the inception of the class size law, we have been steadfast in our position that the city must implement the class size law in a responsible manner. We must begin any conversation about this law by acknowledging that, despite best intentions, there are critical challenges to address so that the law's current mandates do not harm school communities more than help them. Many school leaders have shared substantial concerns that the lack of adequate funding for additional teachers and/or the absence of space makes it incredibly challenging for their schools to comply with the class size legislation. We have consistently sounded the alarm that additional funding is not provided to help their schools meet the new class size limits, school leaders may be forced to eliminate existing programs, reduce their enrollment, and/or alter how they utilize spaces.

We commend the city for last year's investment of \$182 million to support implementation of the state class size mandate. As we approach the 2025-2026 school year, the law requires 60% of classes to be at or below the new class size caps. Our union has collaborated with the DOE and UFT on an application process to make sure that additional funding is being distributed to schools that need support in the coming school year.

More funding is still needed to successfully phase the law in over the next three school years. The DOE has been transparent from the start that while some schools are well-positioned to comply with the new class size legislation without any complications, there are many schools that have no capacity to expand and no additional space for new construction. Meanwhile, concerns about staffing needs abound.

The DOE projected the need for approximately 9,000 additional teachers to comply with the new mandates, but other estimates have increased this number to between 10,000 and 12,000. The need for a substantial increase in the number of teachers will clearly result in the need for additional supervisors. Current school leaders, who are already operating under untenable demands and workloads, will be overwhelmed by additional evaluations, observations, and professional development responsibilities to train the significant increase in new teachers and paraprofessionals. We must ensure that the existing supervisory workforce is not further overstretched and burnt out. As the plan that the city submitted to NYSED suggests, we will continue to advocate for a proportional increase in supervisory support to maintain effective instruction and professional development for the anticipated influx of teachers. Otherwise, the academic gains from smaller class sizes may be eroded since the law necessitates hiring new teachers who may require more professional development and support due to their lack of experience.

The state's Contracts for Excellence (C4E) funding provides schools with resources based on factors such as per capita enrollment and the demographic composition of the student body, including special needs students and those in temporary housing. As the class size law stands, the state does not offer schools any additional funding to comply with the new class size limits. Without increased funding streams, schools will be forced to reallocate their existing monies to comply with the new staffing requirements and likely eliminate vital after-school tutoring, intervention, clubs, sports, arts, music, drama, STEM, robotics, and other extracurricular programs or partnerships with community-based organizations. Schools use C4E funds to support students with the greatest needs like, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students in poverty. Forcing schools to divert these funds would put the cost of reducing class sizes directly on schools themselves and would inevitably lead to a reduction of services and support that our most vulnerable students need.

The city's Fair Student Funding Formula is therefore a critical element of this discussion. We have maintained for years that this formula is inherently flawed. It has consistently disadvantaged certain schools, leaving them in a perpetual state of financial appeal simply to secure the resources needed for basic operation. The city obviously constructed the current formula before the law, and the current construct assumes classes made up of thirty students. The city must find new funding streams or increase Fair Student Funding to properly implement the new class size limits, otherwise too many schools may have a financial inability to provide the same level of programming.

When schools enact the new caps, some will be forced to reduce enrollment, which will lessen the FSF funding they receive. After reducing class sizes, the per-student funds may no longer be sufficient. For instance, a school with a third-grade class of thirty students may currently receive enough per-student funding for one teacher; however, when the new law limits third-grade classes to twenty students, the school's budget must suddenly fund two third-grade teachers. We must increase FSF to align with the new caps or too many schools will now become underfunded according to the city's own formula.

School Safety

To teach and learn, teachers and students must feel valued, respected, and safe. The first and most important priority of every school leader is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our students while maintaining a culture that is conducive to learning and respectful to all. CSA has shared our members' growing concerns about school safety for years, advocating for resources allocated to schools to provide safe learning environments and warning about the erosion of school leaders' discretion over decisions that affect the well-being of their communities. Unfortunately, our members are growing more concerned about school safety than they have been in decades. CSA asks the City Council for its continued support as we fight for safety measures that allow our children to learn, our teachers to teach, and our administrators to lead.

Safety Agents

The number of school safety agents has been steadily declining, and our union and its members have increasingly spoken out—both internally and publicly—about the impact this has on school safety. While the city often cites recruitment challenges, it has failed to develop a comprehensive and systematic plan to address these shortages. Recruitment and retention must be prioritized, and the city must explore better incentives, including increased compensation, to ensure an adequate workforce.

The mayor and the chancellor both acknowledge the importance of safety agents, and CSA is committed to collaborating with the administration to secure the necessary personnel. The DOE, in collaboration with the CSA and NYPD, must create a comprehensive framework for the appropriate assignment of safety agents to schools and campuses. Assignments should be based on factors such as school size, campus complexity, and safety needs, ensuring equitable coverage across the city.

Additionally, Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers must receive the same safety protections as traditional K-12 schools. Currently, a 3-K classroom inside a DOE building benefits from a safety agent's presence, but standalone ECE centers do not receive comparable security. We must address this inequity and ensure that all students, regardless of age, are equally protected.

Restorative Practices

School safety is not just about physical protection—it is also about fostering a culture of respect. CSA has long supported restorative justice practices as an essential and necessary complement to appropriate disciplinary measures. Principals must have discretion to make decisions they know are in the best interest of their school communities, and we all know that disciplinary interventions alone will never resolve the underlying conflicts that affect school communities.

To that end, every teacher and administrator should be trained in restorative justice practices by June 2026, and funding should be provided to establish dedicated restorative justice programs in every school. These initiatives will ensure that school leaders have the tools to balance discipline with opportunities for reconciliation and behavioral growth. Restorative justice is particularly effective in addressing interpersonal conflicts, reducing bullying, and strengthening school culture—all of which directly impact student safety.

Counselor Integration

While security personnel and policies are vital, much of what impacts student safety is peer relationships, social dynamics, and school climate. Harassment, bullying, and gang activity remain major concerns across New York City schools. While restorative justice practices help, peer mediation programs and proactive guidance counselor engagement are also necessary to prevent conflict before it escalates.

CSA urges the city to implement uniform programs to address bullying, harassment, and gang-related conflicts with a focus on peer-led mediation and conflict resolution. In addition, guidance counselors should have a structured role in classroom engagement, providing social-emotional learning (SEL) activities that reinforce safety and trust among students. Counselors must be provided the appropriate caseload so that they have the ability to push into classrooms, lead small groups, engage in one-on-one counseling, and foster relationships with students before problems arise.

Mental Health Support

The mental health crisis among students has been escalating for years, exacerbated by unique pressures, including economic insecurity, gang violence, social media, and the long-term impacts of COVID-19. Five years after the pandemic, we still do not fully understand the depth of its psychological effects on students, their families, and even school staff.

Mental health challenges are particularly acute for students in temporary housing, asylum seekers, and those facing systemic barriers to stability. The rise in social media-driven bullying has further compounded anxiety and depression among youth. Without intervention, these stressors contribute to behavioral issues, absenteeism, and even school violence.

To address this, CSA recommends integrating mental health professionals into school safety strategies, ensuring that emotional and behavioral health considerations are integrated into broader safety planning. The city must also create programs that grow greater involvement from our parent partners and provide resources for parents, recognizing that student well-being is deeply connected to family stability.

Security Technology

For years, CSA has advocated for increased investment in school security infrastructure, particularly cameras and buzzer systems. Mayor Adams responded by recently funding these measures after a violent attack at a school highlighted the urgent need for improved security. The DOE has reported that implementation is consistently progressing, despite early setbacks. We believe that we must comprehensively expand surveillance cameras in every school. We hear

from principals on a regular basis regarding this concern, detailing how incidents could have been avoided had a requested camera been installed.

The next step in modernizing school security must include expanding and repairing metal detectors and scanners. While scanners serve a critical purpose in preventing weapons from entering schools, non-functional or insufficient scanning stations create bottlenecks at entry points, leading to unsafe overcrowding. The DOE must ensure that schools have adequate, fully operational scanners to improve safety without creating new vulnerabilities due to long wait times and congested entryways.

Additional Safety Measures and Training

CSA also urges the city to restore proven safety measures from past decades that have since been eliminated or scaled back:

- Restore the position of Youth Officers in each local precinct. These officers worked directly with school communities, building relationships with students and staff while providing targeted support.
- Re-establish the practice of safe corridors to protect students during arrival and dismissal.
- Regularly train school staff and students on updated Respect for All expectations, safety protocols, including lockdowns, active shooter drills, and emergency evacuations.
- Develop actionable plans to address gaps between schools, district, and central communication, ensuring smooth crisis management, consistent protocols, and overall safety operations.

Executive Leadership Institute

One way that we support the educators that we represent is through our professional development affiliate, the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI). In 2002, CSA recognized a significant void and need in professional development, training, and support services for school leaders. We established ELI because we recognize that the success of our faculty, support staff, and most importantly, our students, is dependent on our ability to lead. Thanks to the City Council's financial support ELI has been able to provide critical support to school leaders and administrators for over 20 years.

Throughout its long history, ELI's programming has been designed and delivered to support school leaders more adequately. ELI provides standards-based, results-driven leadership training to help school leaders successfully fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders. ELI is an approved CTLE Sponsor (Continuing Teacher and Leader Education) and an approved DASA Provider in NYS (Dignity for All Students Act). ELI maintains five Educational Learning Centers in each of the five boroughs of NYC. At these centers, professional development training workshops are conducted in person and/or on zoom. ELI's programs give school leaders the tools they need to create true learning communities, and New York needs to invest more in this kind of high-level training and support.

As the need for more school leaders grows each year, the demand for a diverse array of programming is also increasing. CSA asks for a \$1,000,000 increase in support for the Executive Leadership Institute to support the following initiatives:

- To expand ELI's professional development services for school leaders. Currently, over 150 single-topic workshops are offered throughout the year to our school leaders.
- To support school leaders in the training and implementation of curricula and instructional practices aligned to the science of reading.
- To provide all school leaders with training in applying restorative practices to reduce suspensions and implementing vital mental health programs.
- To expand mentoring and coaching to first-year principals through one-on-one exchanges as they assume the heavy responsibility of running their schools for the first time.
- To enhance the School Leadership Institute, our three-year educational program that supports newly assigned Assistant Principals, Education Administrators, and Early Childhood Directors. Currently, ELI mentors over 350 new supervisors who engage in confidential mentoring sessions and professional development workshops throughout the year.
- To provide professional development on how school leaders can best take advantage of emerging AI technology to better serve students.
- To provide professional development on how to combat chronic absenteeism for all grade levels.

Similarly, CSA and ELI believe we must expand our Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals (ALPAP), to attract and support school leaders considering becoming a school principal. This is vitally important as we anticipate a high turnover in school leadership in the coming months. Many school leaders delayed their retirement during the pandemic so that they didn't leave their school community stranded at a particularly vulnerable time. Others are departing the system earlier than expected due to burnout from the mental, emotional, and physical toll that the job has taken on them and their families.

ALPAP helps school leaders and administrators develop leadership skills aligned with the NYCDOE School Leadership Competencies and supports them on their path to becoming principals. Components of the program include seminars, action research, in-person field experiences at colleagues' schools, and a mentor who is currently a principal. Throughout the year-long program, participants expand their skill set, develop confidence, and grow a network for support and follow-up. ALPAP provides a path forward for Assistant Principals and Education Administrators who have demonstrated a readiness to become Principals, and every year we foster a new cohort of strong, inspired, and dynamic leaders to help our youth succeed.

There is no entity that has done more to recruit, train, and retain New York City school principals than ELI. As our system faces increasing challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining principals, we ask that you increase the city's investment in ELI and its flagship principal preparation program, ALPAP.

Conclusion

We'd be remiss if we didn't take this opportunity to thank the council for their support in our ongoing efforts to put early childhood educators working in CBO-based centers on a path toward

pay parity with their DOE Counterparts. As you know, CSA represents Directors and Assistant Directors of Early Childhood Centers run by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). The success of the City's Pre-K and 3-K initiatives are dependent on these CBO directors who work tirelessly to serve NYC families. CSA has consistently demonstrated that CBO directors and assistant directors perform substantially equal work under similar working conditions as directors of early education programs operated in public school facilities. This pay-scale inequity threatens to compromise the stability and quality of early childhood education.

Our CBO-based members were without a contract for far too long after the previous agreement expired in 2020. However, we are pleased to share that we have come to a tentative agreement with the Day Care Council and our members will finally see well deserved increases in their city-funded positions. We thank the City Council for working with the city to secure substantial funding for the labor reserves.

There is still more work to do in the coming years. CBOs struggle to recruit and retain staff precisely because their salaries do not match DOE salaries; CBOs consistently lose staff to higher paying positions. Meanwhile, the DOE has asserted the same standards apply in all early childhood programs in New York City. When the city pays CBO Directors on a lower scale and treats them like second-class citizens, they and the children in their care are stigmatized and branded as less important. The city's unwillingness to address this disparity communicates to the families that utilize these programs that they deserve less. We thank you for your continuing support for these incredible educational leaders.

I thank the finance committee for the opportunity to address you and share our feedback and concerns. Thank you all for your continued leadership, partnership, and thoughtful consideration regarding school leaders' concerns as we all look to do our best to improve the lives of our city's most crucial resource – our children.

Sincerely,

Henry D Rubio
CSA President

**Testimony
of
Rachel Natelson
General Counsel
NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE)**

Before the

**New York City Council
Committee on Education**

On

Thursday, March 13th, 2025



Good morning, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Rachel Natelson and I have the honor of serving as the General Counsel at the NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE).

CORE is a 15-person led independent commission established through the November 2022 ballot to hold government accountable to advancing racial equity in government operations and increasing community voice in government decision making. We are charged with carrying out five mandates, one of which is to respond to requests of the speaker of the council and its committees regarding racial equity concerns, and I appear before you now in response to the Education Committee's call for testimony on the NYC Public Schools Budget for FY26.

CORE is directed by the City Charter to work with local community members to identify the needs and priorities they view as most relevant to their wellbeing, giving particular consideration to the priorities of groups or categories of community members that have been historically underrepresented in, or underserved by, government and its processes. To fulfill this obligation, our Community Organizing and Engagement staff has thus far partnered with 42 organizations across the five boroughs to hold 220 community conversations over a four-month period, ultimately receiving feedback from over 4000 respondents.

Among the Community Equity Priority (CEPs) we identified was reducing racial and economic segregation and education gap by increasing support to schools and helping all students and families with their educational and other service needs. During our conversations, young people and parents reported widespread disappointment with what they knew to be a city of two school systems: one well-resourced and supportive and the other struggling and hostile. Moreover, these disparities align starkly with race, with comments from community members illustrating that in a school system where 75% of Black and Hispanic students attend a school with fewer than 10% white students, separate is decidedly not equal. From afterschool programs and libraries to counseling, special education, and interpretation resources, community members complained of uneven access, at times within a single school building.

These disparities are not merely accidental but, rather, are the product of historical policies and practices that continue to impede racial and economic integration. New York, for example, is home to more screened public middle and high schools than in any other city despite evidence that open admissions yield considerably more inclusive schools to the benefit of the entire student body. While the City's 2019 School Diversity Advisory Group recommended such measures as a moratorium on new Gifted & Talented programs, the elimination of academic tracking in elementary schools and screening in middle schools, and a pause on the creation of new screened high schools, the ensuing years have brought a reversal of this movement towards greater fairness.

At a moment when public and private institutions around the country disavow the pursuit of racial equity and social justice, the City has a unique opportunity to assert, in fidelity to the preamble to the Charter, that our diversity is our strength. To apply this tenet to our school system through affirmative efforts to further integration is not only permissible under the law but also emblematic of the Charter's directive that the values introduced in the preamble guide the operation of government.

Despite ongoing efforts to cast integration efforts as illegal, K-12 schools are free to implement race-neutral plans to ensure greater student body diversity so long as they do not intentionally seek to exclude any group of students based on their race or national origin. While legal challenges have been lodged against such non-exclusionary race-neutral efforts to increase Black and Hispanic student access to elite public high schools, they have yet to succeed. Moreover, the State Attorney General has alerted schools to their continued obligation to provide all students with access to the instruction, enrichment opportunities, and counseling necessary to prepare them for college and careers, explicitly endorsing targeted action to increase awareness of these resources by communities of color.

In addition to hearing of disparities in access to opportunity, CORE's community engagement staff received consistent feedback in support of constructive alternatives to school-based policing, whether in the form of NYPD safety agents targeting students of color or school personnel reporting their parents to the Administration for Children's Services. Our conversations with community members often revealed a lack of trust in an institution that increasingly serves as a gateway not only to educational and career opportunities but also to such basic services as food, childcare, transportation, and medical and mental health care.

For many students and families harmed by racism and social injustice, a system that should function as a haven instead elicits feelings of neglect and, at times, even fear of persecution based on race, sexual orientation, gender identity, language ability, or immigration status. In CORE's conversations with a cross-section of New Yorkers, we heard from youth who feel threatened and belittled by police, parents penalized for being poor, and immigrant students afraid to exercise their right to a public education.

Safe and thriving schools require adequate resources and investment, and CORE stands with its community partner Dignity in Schools Campaign in requesting that funding be redirected from police hiring, police-involved programming, and surveillance equipment to restorative justice and social-emotional supports. We also echo the call for baselining such previously funded programs as the mental health continuum and immigrant family communications and outreach. Our communities are here today telling us what they need to feel safe, protected and to thrive, and we urge you to listen and invest in them accordingly.



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

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the union's more than 190,000 members, I would like to thank Education Chair Rita Joseph and all the members of the City Council's Committee on Education for holding today's public hearing on the New York City preliminary budget for fiscal year 2026. I would also like to thank Speaker Adrienne Adams for her leadership during this year's budget process.

Protecting Our Schools

Protecting New York City's schools is more important than ever as the federal government attacks public education. We must also safeguard against executive orders that harm our students, particularly our newly arrived and LGBTQ+ students. On the local level, we must continue to fund our public schools, despite City Hall's constant claims of financial shortfalls.

Respect for Paraprofessionals

Protecting public education in NYC also requires sustained commitment to recruiting and retaining educators, specifically paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals develop deep relationships with their students, providing them with the encouragement and support they need to thrive. They also work in lockstep with teachers, collaborating to best serve every child in each classroom. Paraprofessionals are proud of the work that they do, and they deserve recognition for it. However, the city has allowed paraprofessionals' wages to remain unacceptably low for far too long. They have acknowledged that these low salaries make it challenging to recruit and retain paraprofessionals, but they have failed to do anything about it.

Education Chair Rita Joseph, Labor Committee Chair Carmen De La Rosa, Council Member Crystal Hudson and Council Member Julie Menin have championed legislation that would provide paraprofessionals with an additional \$10,000 or more annually. It is time to give our paraprofessionals the respect they deserve, and we are not the only ones who think so. A total of 33 City Council Members have said they will be co-prime sponsors

of the legislation. Additionally, a petition in favor of this legislation has already amassed over 73,000 signatures – and counting – from individuals who believe paras deserve to feel valued and appreciated.

Undoubtedly, the city will tell us that it cannot fund this legislation, but we cannot trust them to tell us the truth when it comes to bookkeeping. At the start of every fiscal year, the city claims it will be short billions of dollars, and we will face large budget deficits in the following years. But, every year, the city miraculously finds the money it needs in the couch cushions.

Since the November 2024 financial plan, the city found an additional nearly \$8 billion dollars. This money came from several sources, including the steep decline in asylum-seeker spending, underspending on personnel and increased tax revenue. With the release of the fiscal year 2026 preliminary budget, the city also announced that its reserves were at an all-time high of \$8.5 billion. Surely, the city has enough funding to provide our paraprofessionals with this respect check.

Class Size

As per state law, the city has a fiscal responsibility to ensure that schools are in full compliance with the class size law by 2028. To reach full compliance, the city must appropriately fund the hundreds of schools that applied for class size funding this year and actualize the School Construction Authority's (SCA) capital plan so that it builds the new seats we need.

The law is non-negotiable. New York State has provided funding for the implementation of this law, and that funding cannot be redirected for other purposes. The city is legally and financially responsible for ensuring that 60% of the classes in New York City comply with the class size law this coming September.

Over the past few months, the DOE, the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) and the UFT have collectively reviewed over 800 applications for class size funding. These applications were completed by individual schools with the input of chapter leaders, principals and school leadership teams. Schools were able to request funds for class size reduction strategies such as hiring more teachers or buying furniture and supplies to open new classrooms. We were incredibly impressed by the creativity and consideration that went into each application. Now, we must ensure that schools get the additional funds they so thoughtfully applied for.

Additionally, the city will need new seats and schools to achieve 100% compliance with the law. Last year, SCA was given an additional \$2 billion for new capacity, yet it has done little with this funding. This is unacceptable.

The fiscal year 2025–29 five-year capital plan from July 2024 approved the creation of 33,417 new seats — 6,701 of which were completed or were in process. As of February 2025, 10,596 of these approved seats have been completed or are in process. This means that in six months the SCA built only 3,895 seats — a generous estimate given the likelihood that not all these seats were completed.

The SCA has also been slow to identify sites for new schools, forcing communities across the city to wait years for new seats in their growing neighborhoods. Our families and students deserve better. The SCA must be proactive about locating sites for new construction and must put its new capacity budget of \$6.13 billion to work promptly.

Fund UFT Programs

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

UFT Teacher Center

The UFT Teacher Center empowers teachers and students through award-winning, embedded professional development tailored to each school's unique needs. With 208 coaches embedded in sites across the city, we have established ourselves as a primary provider of high-quality, relevant and innovative professional learning aligned with state and city initiatives.

In school year 2024–25, we opened 28 new Teacher Center sites. The year before that, we delivered over 128,000 hours of transformative professional development and provided seminars to over 317,000 participants, educators, principals and parents. Additionally, 99% of participating educators reported that the Teacher Center's professional learning sessions improved their practice.

We have also used City Council funding to provide high-quality support in three urgently needed areas:

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

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

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

For 2025–26, we are requesting a grant of \$6.5 million from the City Council Speakers Initiative and \$4.12 million from the City Council’s discretionary funds. We have always focused on what NYC educators, students and parents need most. With that in mind, we intend to increase our partnership with the UFT’s family care providers this year to address the city’s urgent needs for early childhood services. With this funding from the City Council, we will also be able to continue to focus on:

- Supporting students with the highest needs and engaging all learners
- Supporting schools in retaining and mentoring new teachers
- Supporting curricula rollout across the city
- Keeping schools at the forefront of technology

United Community Schools (UCS)

United Community Schools is a teacher-inspired and educator-led nonprofit with proven results. Within each school there is a community school director who leverages outside relationships to bring the necessary resources directly to students and families. Our community schools provide food for families and offer mental health, physical health, dental and vision services within school buildings.

In the 2023–24 school year there were:

- 35,716 families fed
- 25,769 mental health visits
- 33,823 health, dental and vision visits

As a result of these robust supports, we see test scores go up, attendance improve, and student engagement increase at our UCS schools. We also hear teachers say they feel more supported, secure and engaged in their work.

This year we are requesting that the Council provide UCS with \$5 million to implement and sustain our 32 community schools. This funding will be used to provide professional development to educators and staff, deliver student and family support services, and coordinate health and mental health resources, which include community school directors and administrative salaries, mental health staff salaries, and supplies and equipment for UCS.

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

The PLC program is one of our most effective tools for bringing equity to New York City public schools and helping teachers, students and parents cope with — and heal from — trauma. In the past several years, over 10,000 educators attended our various workshops, and PLC schools have experienced 53% improvement in school culture, a combined 46% reduction in principal and superintendent suspensions and a 40% reduction in total incidents.

Recently, the PLC has collaborated with the MAP program to further expand the UFT's capacity to meet the needs of educators and school communities around social emotional support, mental health support and professional development opportunities. Our MAP careline has received over 20,000 calls since 2022, with a recent increase in calls relating to bias and hate crimes, as well as immigration crackdowns and fear of deportation of our students. Since 2019, MAP has also offered the Let's Talk About It all-day program to thousands of middle school students from around the NYC area, with a focus on the Bronx in the 2023–24 school year and Queens in the 2024–25 school year. Additionally, since 2018, MAP has also offered thousands of hours of professional learning opportunities and credits to educators and counselors. We are requesting \$1.9 million for the 2025–26 school year, to sustain and expand all these citywide supports.

Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence (PROSE)

PROSE amplifies the voices of educators by enabling them to propose school-level innovations that bolster student excellence. These innovations may include how teachers are hired and evaluated and how students are programmed throughout the day. Many of the over 200 PROSE schools that currently exist have a strong emphasis on project-based learning. The program includes most of the consortium high schools in the city, which have a state waiver allowing them to replace state Regents exams with project-based assessments, as well as other schools that focus on this kind of curriculum and assessment. PROSE also includes most of the Internationals Network of high schools, which are focused on serving students who are new arrivals to our city. We propose to use \$300,000 in City Council funds to support schools in continuing these efforts, to expand the program to more school communities around the city, and to facilitate the sharing of best practices between schools around these innovations in the 2025–26 school year.

BRAVE Hotline

Bullying continues to pose a significant challenge in our schools, deeply affecting students' mental health, academic potential and overall well-being. That is why UFT's BRAVE (Building Respect, Acceptance and Voice through Education) hotline has been an invaluable resource to students, their families and educators who can call, chat or text for help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As our schools face evolving challenges, such as the rise of cyberbullying and the increasing diversity of student needs, it is imperative that BRAVE continues to adapt and expand its critical services. Strengthening this program through enhanced training for educators, broader outreach initiatives and the integration

of innovative strategies will ensure that it remains a cornerstone of safety and well-being in our schools. We are requesting a grant of \$300,000 from City Council for this fiscal year to help us increase access to this crucial program and to expand the range of services available to our students and families.

Dial-A-Teacher

Dial-A-Teacher operates Mondays through Thursdays from 4 to 7 p.m., offering help in nine languages, including Spanish, Mandarin and Bengali. Last year, the program received over 35,000 calls. Dial-A-Teacher is respectfully requesting \$300,000 in City Council funding for fiscal year 2026 to allow us to expand access to these supports by increasing the number of teachers available to answer calls, continuing with technological upgrades and providing staff development that will enhance our ability to serve students in the modern educational arena.

Support Citywide Initiatives

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

1. **Teacher's Choice** – Thank you for your continued support of the Teacher's Choice program. It is a key initiative to ensure teachers and other school staff are reimbursed for the school supplies and materials they purchase for their classrooms and for many of their students in need. We ask that you continue to provide \$20 million in baseline funding for Teacher's Choice in fiscal year 2026.
2. **Arts in Education** – The arts introduce our students to new ways of thinking and expressing themselves. That is why we ask that the City Council support Broadway Bridges, which ensures high school students see a Broadway show before they graduate and supports arts education in schools in the fiscal year 2026 budget.
3. **Commonpoint** – Commonpoint is a social services organization that supports the diverse needs of New Yorkers of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. The organization offers a variety of supports for youths and families, ranging from sports programs and summer camps to job training and college access assistance. We ask that you support Commonpoint's programs in the fiscal year 2026 budget.

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

2009

MAP was founded, filling a void in the mental health care of UFT members. In our infancy, we were referring out members more than we were taking in their cases.

2011

MAP began offering support groups, allowing members to grow and connect with one another in a safe and confidential space.

2016

Members began requesting services targeting substance abuse. MAP also saw a significant increase in new teachers, which led to the creation of Partners Through Experience, a program pairing new educators and retirees.

2017

MAP is recognized by the state as an approved provider to offer Continuing Education courses for licensed social workers at a discounted price.

2018

The continuing education services expanded to include courses for licensed mental health counselors. MAP also began a partnership with NYU to support caregivers helping those with Alzheimer's.

2019

MAP began two signature annual events: Let's Talk About It and the Mental Health Symposium. Both were created to address substance use psychoeducation for children and adults. The Brewing Wellness podcast, originally Classroom Café, also started this year.

2020

MAP collaborated with the McLean Hospital to create the Center for Trauma Education Program (CTEP), supporting people coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

MAP hosted the first NYC Clinical Connection, a quarterly event bringing together all NYC-based mental health resources for professional development and networking. We also partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to create Shattering the Stigma, a program designed to help those struggling with mental illness.

2022

MAP began its partnership with Calm, hosting monthly well-being sessions for members.

2023

MAP began its partnership with Vibrant to run a 24-hour helpline, supporting members outside of office hours and bridging the language barriers. Continuing education courses are also offered for licensed psychologists.

Goals for 2025

- ⊕ **Maintain the quality and frequency of current services**
- ⊕ **Offer more continuing education courses for licensed social workers, mental health counselors and psychologists**
- ⊕ **Expand support services for new members**
- ⊕ **Build and facilitate additional support groups**

Hear from our members:

“

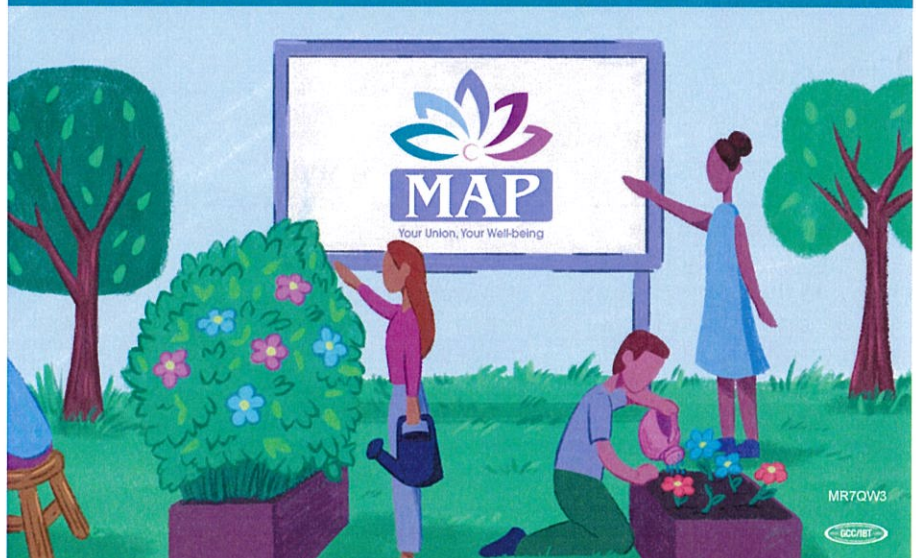
Thank you, MAP, for the tips, journal prompts and worksheets. I am very grateful for these sessions. I am learning so much.

“

I have loved the sessions I have attended. It's a nice way to hear various voices — acknowledging we are not alone in our thoughts and ideas. THANK YOU SO MUCH!

“

MAP has a tremendous, special gift of how to present to a group in a dignified way that affords them dignity as well. To me, it indicates character!



MR7QW3

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United Federation of Teachers **MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Since 2009, we have supported the people that educate the next generation of New Yorkers.

The UFT's Member Assistance Program (MAP) guides our members through problems that affect their mental health with a skilled team of trained professional counselors and mental health advocates. Our services for members are free, confidential, and voluntary. Our unique skill set ensures all members are able to access the support they need, while they continue supporting the future of our city.



100K+

Members served in our 14 years of operation.

2023-24

85+

Events hosted annually.

2023-24

10+

Services offered, including our new UFT hotline.

2023-24

\$1.7M

Needed this year to maintain our services.

2024-25

We have resources for everyone.

SUPPORT GROUPS

MAP offers various free support groups for UFT members in which members come together to share their experiences, stories, and tips and find comfort with each other. Our support groups run throughout the school year and are held in a confidential space by licensed professionals.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Since 2019 we have educated almost 3,000 middle school students across the boroughs on the importance of mental health and mindfulness. This annual event helps young people, as well as their educators, learn about their social and emotional health and wellness.

MENTAL HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

This annual event brings together mental health clinicians, teachers and educators, with the possibility of earning 4.5 Continuing Education credits at the end of the day.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

As an approved provider by the New York State Education Department's State Board, we offer Continuing Education credits for licensed social workers, mental health counselors and psychologists at a discounted rate.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT

Two proven programs, the Member Assistance Program (MAP) and Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC), are addressing the growing mental health and wellness crisis in NYC through vital support and programming for staff, students, and families.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$1,900,000 for the 2025-26 school year, to continue to sustain and expand all these citywide supports.

BRAVE HOTLINE

UFT's BRAVE (Building Respect, Acceptance and Voice through Education) hotline allows students, families and educators dealing with bullying to contact our hotline for immediate help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$300,000 to help us increase access to this crucial program and to expand the range of services available to our students and families.

TEACHER'S CHOICE

We thank you for your ongoing support of this program. Teacher's Choice is a key initiative to ensure teachers and other school staff are reimbursed for the school supplies and materials they purchase for their classrooms and for many of their students in need.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Continue the \$20 million baseline funding for Teacher's Choice.

COMMONPOINT

Commonpoint is a social services organization that supports the diverse needs of New Yorkers of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Support Commonpoint's programs in the FY 26 budget.

PROGRESSIVE REDESIGN OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS FOR EXCELLENCE

PROSE amplifies the voices of educators by enabling them to propose school-level innovations that bolster student excellence. These innovations may include how teachers get hired and evaluated and how students are programmed throughout the day.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$300,000 in City Council funds to support schools in continuing these efforts, to expand the program to more school communities around the city, and to facilitate the sharing of best practices between schools around these innovations.

DIAL-A-TEACHER

Dial-A-Teacher operates Mondays through Thursdays from 4 to 7 p.m., offering homework help in nine languages, including Spanish, Mandarin, and Bengali. Last year, the program received over 35,000 calls.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$300,000 to increase the number of teachers available to answer calls, continue with technological upgrades and provide staff development that will enhance our ability to service students in the modern educational arena.

ARTS IN EDUCATION

The arts introduce our students to new ways of thinking and expressing themselves.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Support Broadway Bridges in the FY 26 budget so that high school students can see a Broadway show before they graduate.
- Support arts education in schools.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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United Federation
of Teachers A UNION OF PROFESSIONALS

uft.org/legislative-priorities



2025 CITY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



Scan this QR code to learn more about the UFT's 2025 city legislative priorities.

PROTECTING OUR SCHOOLS

Protecting New York City's schools is more important than ever as the federal government attacks public education.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Fully fund New York City's schools.
- Safeguard against harmful executive orders that target our students, particularly our newly arrived and LGBTQ+ students.

CLASS SIZE

The class size law is non-negotiable. New York State has provided funding for the implementation of this law, and that funding cannot be redirected for other purposes. The City is legally and financially responsible for ensuring that schools are in full compliance with the law by 2028.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Appropriately fund the hundreds of schools that applied for class size funding for the 2025-26 school year.
- Enact the capital plan so that it creates the new seats we need.

RESPECT FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Respecting, recruiting, and retaining paraprofessionals in New York City is paramount. Paraprofessionals are the backbone of our public schools. Yet the city cannot hire or retain them due to the unfair practice of pattern bargaining, which shortchanges paraprofessionals.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- Pass legislation to give paraprofessionals an additional \$10,000 or more per year.
- A UFT petition has gained over 72,000 signatures in support of this legislation.

With reserves at a record of \$8.5 billion, the City has the funding to make this legislation a reality for its dedicated paraprofessionals.



FUND UFT PROGRAMS

UFT TEACHER CENTER

The UFT Teacher Center promotes teacher excellence and student achievement through professional learning that addresses the diverse needs of the whole child.

- ✓ 208 Teacher Center coaches embedded in schools across NYC in 2024-25
- ✓ 317,597 participants – educators, principals, and parents – attended Teacher Center seminars in 2023-24
- ✓ 128,861 hours of transformative professional development in 2023-24
- ✓ 99% of participating educators report that the professional learning sessions improved their practice

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$6.5 million from the City Council Speakers Initiative and \$4.12 million from the City Council's Discretionary Funds to:
 - Support students with the highest needs and engage all learners.
 - Support schools in retaining and mentoring new teachers.
 - Support curricula rollout across the city.
 - Keep schools at the forefront of technology.

UNITED COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

United Community Schools (UCS) is a teacher-inspired nonprofit improving outcomes for over 19,000 families at the 39 community schools it operates across NYC and Albany.

- ✓ Higher test scores
- ✓ Better attendance
- ✓ More credits earned
- ✓ Increased sense of safety
- ✓ 6:1 return on investment
- ✓ 35,716 families fed
- ✓ 25,769 mental health visits
- ✓ 33,823 health, dental, and vision visits

WHAT WE'RE ASKING:

- \$5 million to implement and sustain 32 community schools that provide critical support to children and families.



United
Community
Schools

✓ Teacher inspired

✓ Research informed

✓ Educator led

✓ Proven results

10+ YEARS TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS IN NYC AND BEYOND

Academic Excellence

Test scores go up, attendance improves, and student engagement increases.¹

Mental Health Support

We address trauma and stress in the classroom, so teachers can teach and students can learn.

School Safety

Teachers, students, and families report feeling more secure and connected.²

Student Wellness

From SEL to nutrition, we take a holistic approach to student success.

Teacher Satisfaction

Educators report feeling more supported, heard, and engaged in their jobs.²

YOUR FUNDING CHANGES LIVES

2022-23 2023-24

FAMILIES FED



MENTAL HEALTH VISITS



HEALTH, DENTAL & VISION VISITS



OUR PROVEN MODEL REMOVES BARRIERS STANDING IN THE WAY OF LEARNING



Addressing stress and trauma with embedded social workers.

- › Strategically designed program improves school culture and climate
- › Students facing challenges receive direct support, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the classroom



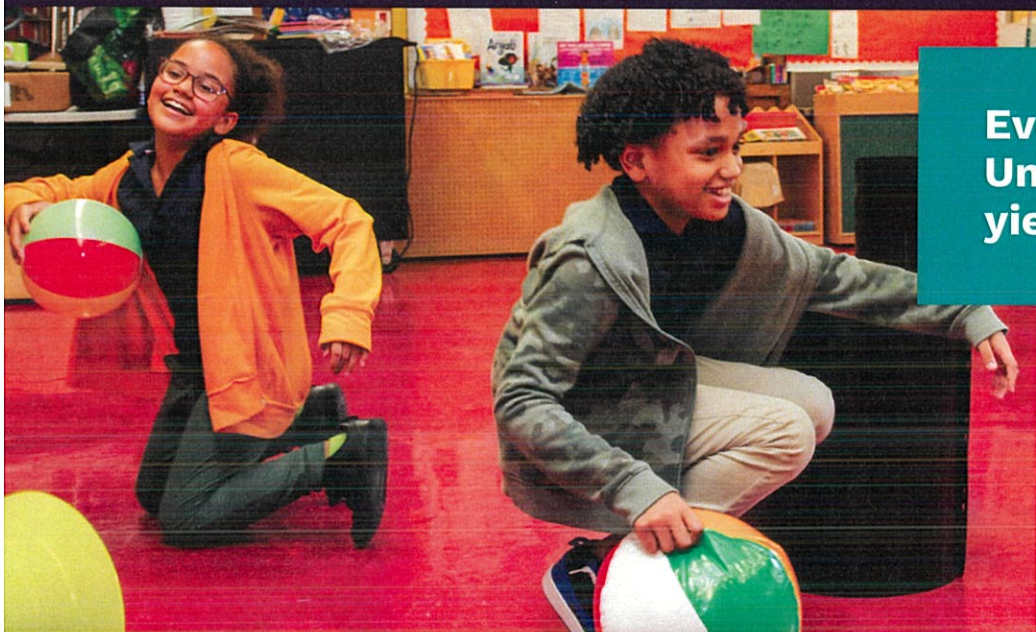
Closing learning gaps while improving test scores and attendance.

- › Community School Directors coordinate after-school tutoring, homework help and attendance check-ins
- › Independent research shows improved outcomes, especially for ELL students



Increasing parent engagement & teacher satisfaction.

- › Schools become community hubs offering nutrition programs, clothing drives, adult education, career fairs and more
- › Parents and teachers become a more connected, united front to help students succeed



Every dollar invested in United Community Schools yields significant returns.

- › We create educational equity for all communities
- › We foster productive, engaged citizens who contribute to our economic and social vitality



For more information on United Community Schools and its immense impact on New York's public school communities, visit unitedcommunityschools.org

¹The evaluation conducted using a rigorous quasi-experimental study closely matched comparison group design approach.

²Data sources: UCS Member Survey administered in 2021–2023 to teachers, paraprofessionals and other staff and UCS Parent Survey administered in 2021. Figures and text represent survey respondents.



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
MARCH 13, 2025**

Good morning,

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

Firstly, I want to acknowledge that the federal relief funding given to schools during the pandemic—Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief—expired last year. This funding was crucial for a number of school programs, and the city stepped up to provide continued funding that otherwise would have been scaled down or ended. While some programs were baselined, others were only extended for a year. The mayor’s preliminary FY26 budget extended funding for Learning to Work and summer programming for another year, but does not include long-term funding.

New York City is currently failing many of its students with disabilities—in particular, preschoolers with disabilities. Though the mayor promised a special education preschool seat for every child who needs one—and is legally entitled to one—it has yet to materialize for many children with disabilities.¹ There are about 450 children who are sitting at home instead of in a classroom where they will receive the support and services they need—though NYC public schools confirmed this number, the preliminary budget does not renew \$55 million in funding for new classrooms.² In addition, the city must invest at least \$70 million to provide preschoolers with evaluations and mandated services. It is important to reiterate that these seats are legally required, and students’ rights are being violated every day that they are not receiving special education services. Last year, more than 14,400 preschoolers with disabilities ended the school year without ever receiving at least one of the types of services the city was legally required to provide,³ and that is unacceptable.

1

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2025/01/29/eric-adams-preschool-students-with-disabilities-still-waiting-for-seats/>

2

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2025/01/29/eric-adams-preschool-students-with-disabilities-still-waiting-for-seats/>

³ <https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2026/>

It is now more urgent than ever to ensure that our undocumented students and newest New Yorkers have access to the services and support they need. In January 2023, the city launched Promise NYC, which helps families who previously didn't qualify for other state or federal programs due to their immigration status, including undocumented parents and asylum-seekers.⁴ It is especially important for recently arrived children to have access to early childhood services, as many are English language learners, and many have experienced significant stress and trauma on their way to New York. The city increased funding in FY25 for Promise NYC, extending access to 1,000 children, but the full \$25 million funding will expire at the end of June if not renewed in the budget.⁵

In August of 2023, Advocates for Children found that only 31.1 percent of NYC schools are fully accessible for people with disabilities.⁶ The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments ensure people with disabilities have equal access to public programs and services, including public education. However, many students with disabilities are barred from attending their neighborhood schools because of inaccessible infrastructure. This not only means that these students are unable to fully access their communities but that they must travel to an accessible school, which may mean hours on a bus every day, cutting into their learning time. This lack of accessibility also means that students' family and community members with accessibility needs are unable to attend events and meetings at these schools. The city must allocate \$450 million in addition to the \$750 million investment in the 2020–2024 Capital Plan, totaling \$1.25 billion to make at least 45 percent of buildings that serve as the primary location for a school fully accessible by 2030.⁷

In 2024, there were 3,645 School Safety Agents employed by the city, with a reported plan to hire recent high school graduates as “assistant” SSAs to pad their ranks.⁸ Police presence and police infrastructure in schools is one way for schools to address their safety concerns, but one that has its roots in times of racial tension. Using police as a safety tool is also reactionary, often addressing violent or disruptive incidents after they happen, and focuses on punishment, discipline, and even arrest as consequences. Restorative justice, however, provides an avenue for students to be held accountable while also learning how to resolve conflict, build relationships, and take responsibility for their actions—all without losing classroom time. The FY25 budget included \$12 million in increasing funding for restorative justice to replace expiring federal

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/content/getstufdone/pages/promise-nyc>

⁵ https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

⁶ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0cd31f41c8224f68a91b913b733bf46d>

⁷ https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

⁸ <https://gothamist.com/news/nypd-is-hiring-young-school-safety-agent-cadets-not-all-students-are-fans>

funding, but it was for one year only, and must be renewed with an additional \$12 million in the FY26 budget to continue.

Mayor Adams campaigned on literacy, and supporting students with dyslexia in particular. However, three years later, parents, educators, and advocates report that schools are still ill-equipped to help students with dyslexia.⁹ Dyslexic students comprise a significant portion of the student population, with experts estimating that between five and twenty percent of students have dyslexia.¹⁰ Kids with dyslexia who do not get the specialized instruction they need, are more likely to struggle with reading for the rest of their lives, drop out of school, and come into contact with the criminal justice system. In 2023, the city launched NYC Reads, which requires each community school district to choose one of three pre-approved reading curricula to use in its K-5 schools.¹¹ Even with the best reading curriculum, there will always be students who need additional instruction and individualized attention, and many students are unable to access the intervention they need in their schools. Schools receive a yearly allocation for academic intervention services (AIS), though it is often insufficient to hire one full-time staff person who must cover both reading and math.¹² The city should invest and baseline at least \$17.5 million to help schools deliver one-on-one or small group intervention to more students who need extra help learning to read.

The pandemic has greatly impacted everyone's mental health, and our students are no exception. Public schools are the main youth mental health system in our city, and an audit published last year by the State Comptroller found that too many public schools are understaffed with mental health professionals, are not adequately training staff, and only a few have services readily available. It also showed that the DOE provides little oversight to ensure students receive the required mental health instruction critical to developing their awareness and resilience.¹³ Further, the majority of schools did not meet the recommended ratio of school counselors and social workers to students. School-based mental health clinics provide a range of on-site mental health services to students during the school day, and most of their current funding comes from Medicaid, which is insufficient to cover the range of supports and services that students and school communities need.¹⁴ To cover this gap, the city should invest and baseline at least \$3.75 million. Additionally, the Mental Health Continuum, a cross-agency partnership to serve students with the greatest mental health needs, requires a renewal of \$5 million in the FY26 budget.

9

<https://gothamist.com/news/kids-with-dyslexia-still-leaving-nyc-public-schools-despite-mayor-adams-pledge>

10

<https://gothamist.com/news/kids-with-dyslexia-still-leaving-nyc-public-schools-despite-mayor-adams-pledge>

¹¹ https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

¹² https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

¹³ <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/state-agencies/audits/pdf/sga-2022-20n7.pdf>

¹⁴ https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/fy26_budget_priorities.pdf

I look forward to working with the Department of Education, the Mayor's Office, and the City Council to ensure our city's students have the supports and services they need to learn and be successful.

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: FY 2026 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

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

We are concerned that a number of important education programs are funded only through the end of this year. If funding is not continued:

- Hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities could lose access to preschool special education programs, in violation of their legal rights, at a time when 450 preschoolers with disabilities are still waiting for seats, and thousands of children could lose access to 3-K;
- The immigrant family outreach initiative could end at a time when changes to federal policy make it essential for schools to be able to communicate key information to families;
- Thousands of students at 50 high-needs schools could lose access to the Mental Health Continuum, while there is an ongoing youth mental health crisis;
- The majority of restorative justice programming could end despite the importance of students learning to resolve conflicts and repair relationships instead of being excluded from school.

We appreciate that the City Council fought for each of these programs last year.

While it is important to ensure these programs and others are continued and baselined, the City must also do more to address pressing needs we see in our work with families. We recommend that the City add at least:

- \$70 million for preschool special education evaluations, services, and staffing at a time when 11,000 preschoolers are waiting for at least one of their mandated services to begin and more than 5,000 are receiving none of their services.

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**Advocates for Children
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Protecting every child's right to learn

- \$17.5 million to expand access to small group support for students who need extra help learning to read; we should not have to take legal action to get private tutoring because our public schools are not equipped to provide effective reading interventions to students who need them.
- \$3.75 million to provide behavioral support not currently funded through school-based mental health clinics, such as training for school staff.
- \$450 million to the five-year Capital Plan to make more schools fully accessible so that students with physical disabilities are not turned away from school because they can't get in the building.

More information about each of these priorities and others is in our written testimony.

Finally, we want to mention our deep concern that Governor Hochul's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula would result in New York City schools getting \$350 million less than they would under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive more resources to NYC schools and certainly do not result in our schools receiving *less money* than they would under the current formula.

We look forward to working with you as the budget process moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

City Education Budget Priorities for FY 2026

Sustain impactful programs.

We appreciate that last year, in the face of expiring federal stimulus funding and city funding, the Administration and the City Council provided continued funding for many impactful education programs that would have otherwise been rolled back or eliminated. While a number of these programs were baselined, others were funded for one year only. The Mayor's FY 2026 Preliminary Budget extends funding for two of them—Summer Rising and Learning to Work—for another year, but many other critical programs were left out and are once again at risk of severe cuts. We are calling on the City to avoid taking a step backwards and **extend and baseline funding for these programs**—helping to ensure their long-term stability and support for students and families.

Key programs left out of the Preliminary Budget that are funded with one-year city dollars expiring in June 2025 include:

- Early Childhood Education
 - Preschool special education classes (\$55M)
 - Promise NYC (\$25M)
 - 3-K and Pre-K: 3-K (\$112M), Extended day seats (\$25M), and Outreach (\$5M)
- Immigrant Family Communication and Outreach (\$4M in expiring funds; we are requesting an increase of \$3M, for a total allocation of \$7M, for FY 2026)
- Restorative Justice (\$12M)
- Mental Health Continuum (\$5M)
- Community Schools (\$14M)

Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

It is also essential for the City to keep moving forward by increasing investments to address the pressing needs we see on the ground in our work with families every day—including the need for legally mandated preschool special education services, one-on-one or small group reading support, mental health support, and accessible schools. We urge the City to:

- Provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need (\$70M) and extend enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations.
- Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read (\$17.5M).
- Enhance services at school-based mental health clinics (\$3.75M).
- Make more schools accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities (\$450M in capital funding over five years).

Sustain impactful programs funded with city funding scheduled to expire in June 2025.

The following education programs are funded, in whole or in part, with one-year city funding set to expire in June unless extended in the FY 2026 budget. The funding amounts listed are the dollar amounts needed merely to sustain these existing programs at their current funding levels; unless funding is extended, students will lose access to these programs. The City should extend and baseline funding for these programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Preschool special education classes (\$55M)

Even as the City has expanded 3-K and Pre-K, 450 three- and four-year-olds with disabilities were waiting for the seats they needed in preschool special education classes as of late January 2025, in violation of their legal rights. We appreciate that the City included \$55M in the FY 2025 budget to open new preschool special education classes. While this funding is not sufficient to address the need for preschool special education classes and services, it has provided seats for hundreds of children with autism and other disabilities who would otherwise be going without the classes they need and have a legal right to receive. However, the \$55M is one-year city funding set to expire in June. As the City keeps working to use this funding to open new classes this year, it is important for everyone to know as soon as possible that funding will continue next year and beyond.

Promise NYC (\$25M)

No child should be turned away from an early learning program because of their immigration status. In January 2023, the City launched Promise NYC to increase access to subsidized childcare for children who would otherwise be ineligible for existing programs due to federal restrictions. We appreciate that the City increased the initiative's funding for FY 2025, allowing 1,000 children to enroll in early care and education programs—helping prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond, while also enabling their parents to work and connect with resources. However, the full \$25M in Administration for Children's Services (ACS) funding for Promise NYC will run out at the end of June if not extended in the FY 2026 budget.

3-K and Pre-K: 3-K (\$112M), Extended day seats (\$25M), and Outreach (\$5M)

3-K and Pre-K programs provide high-quality early learning opportunities to children—helping prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond. The previous Administration used temporary federal funding to expand 3-K, which had 17,500 children participating in 2019–20 and now serves around 40,000 students. We appreciate that the City has continued the program with city dollars and also invested additional funding to provide more extended day seats and do much-needed community outreach. However, the City's current investment in early childhood education includes one-year city dollars for 3-K (\$112M), extended day seats (\$25M), and outreach (\$5M), all set to expire in June.

MULTI-FACETED IMMIGRANT FAMILY COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH (\$4M in expiring one-year city funds; we are requesting an increase of \$3M, for a total of \$7M)

This initiative strengthens New York City Public Schools' (NYCPS') communication with immigrant families—many of whom would otherwise be left without important information—by using local ethnic media to share school-related updates, sending paper notices to families' homes, reaching families via phone calls and text messages, helping schools bolster their translation and interpretation systems, and collaborating with immigrant-facing community-based organizations to create and launch information campaigns. However, this work is currently supported by \$4M in one-year city funding that expires this June. Given the increase in the number of newly arrived immigrant families in New York City, it is critical for this initiative to continue, particularly at a time when changes in federal policies could lead families to keep their children out of school or avoid accessing educational services for which they are eligible. In addition to restoring the current \$4M budget, the City should invest an additional \$3M (for a total allocation of \$7M) to help meet the growing need for translation and interpretation and to help ensure information—including information about the rights of students with disabilities—reaches families who speak languages other than English via comprehensive information campaigns.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (\$12M)

All students deserve schools where they feel safe and supported, but without sufficient resources and appropriate alternatives for addressing behavior and helping students navigate conflict, schools will continue to resort to suspensions—which do not repair relationships or make schools safer; disproportionately impact students of color, students with disabilities, and youth who are homeless or in the foster system; and have been linked with lower educational attainment and higher odds of future contact with the juvenile or criminal legal system. Restorative justice practices enable schools to keep students in the classroom while helping them resolve conflicts and build and repair relationships. We appreciate that the FY 2025 budget included \$12M in increased city funding to replace expired federal stimulus dollars. However, this \$12M was for one year only.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM (\$5M)

The Mental Health Continuum is a cross-agency partnership (NYCPS, Health + Hospitals, Department of Health & Mental Hygiene) to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare. This innovative model, which was highlighted in the [Mayor's Mental Health Plan](#) and the [City Council's Mental Health Roadmap](#), supports students at 50 high-needs schools through school partnerships with H+H mental health clinics, dedicated staff to provide students with timely access to mental health services, a NYC Well hotline to advise school staff, mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis, and training for school staff in Collaborative Problem Solving to build their capacity to address student behavior. Recognizing the youth mental health crisis, the [Mayor announced](#) last April that the City would open 16 mental health clinics as part of the Mental Health Continuum. These clinics are now up and running, serving thousands of students. However, the \$5M for this initiative (NYCPS: \$787K, H+H: \$3.74M, DOHMH: \$472K) is set to expire in June.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (\$14M)

Community schools provide students and their families with wrap-around supports and services, such as after-school programming, adult education classes, and medical, dental, and mental healthcare. Community schools have had a positive impact; a report found that compared to otherwise similar schools, community schools in New York City had significantly lower chronic absenteeism; higher on-time graduation; and fewer disciplinary incidents. While most of the City's 400 community schools have baselined funding, the City is currently using \$14M in one-year city funding to support more than 50 community schools.

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

- Teacher Recruitment (\$10M)
- High-Impact Tutoring (\$4M)
- Arts Programming (\$41M)
- Student Success Centers (\$3.3M)

Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

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

Provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need (\$70M) and extend enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at CBOs.

Parents know that the preschool years provide a critical window for addressing developmental delays, but thousands of them hit a wall when trying to secure the most basic services for their children. Forty-five percent of preschoolers with IEPs—more than 14,400 children—ended the 2023–24 school year without ever receiving at least one of the types of services the City was legally required to provide. This year, we have continued to hear from numerous families whose preschoolers are waiting for their services to begin, as well as families unable to get an appointment for a preschool evaluation in the first place. In fact, as of late January, more than 5,600 preschoolers with IEPs were receiving *none* of their mandated services—representing 22% of all preschoolers recommended for related services and/or Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services (a part-time special education teacher to help include a 3-K or pre-K student in their general education class). An additional 5,800 preschoolers were receiving at least one, but not all, of their services. While we appreciate the \$55M investment in FY 2025 to open new preschool special education classes, this funding does not address the need for evaluations or the need for services for children with disabilities participating in general education or integrated 3-K and Pre-K classes.

The City must address these legal violations and ensure young children with disabilities are not left waiting for the help they need. The City should invest and baseline at least \$70M to provide preschoolers with evaluations and mandated services by taking steps such as launching more NYCPS evaluation teams; hiring more Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) staff to help parents with the evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting process; hiring more NYCPS service providers and teachers; and allocating funding to NYCPS Pre-K Centers and schools with 3-K and Pre-K programs so that young children receive their special education services where they go to preschool.

In addition to this investment, the City should extend the enhanced provisions of the early childhood education labor agreement reached this fall to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations. While AFC has no vested interest in teacher compensation, we are very concerned about the implications of returning to a system where preschool special education teachers are the lowest paid teachers in New York City, despite working with children with some of the most intensive needs—including children with severe autism, serious medical conditions, or significant behavioral needs—and doing so over the twelve-month school year. Continuing to exclude teachers of preschool special education classes from the agreement will likely result in teachers leaving for higher paid jobs, classes closing, and even more children sitting at home in violation of their legal rights.

The City should invest and baseline at least \$70M to address the systemic failure to provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need and should extend the enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at CBOs to help address the shortage of preschool special education classes.

Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read (\$17.5M).

Far too many NYC students struggle to become skilled readers: less than half of all students in grades 3–8, including only 37% of Black and Hispanic students and 21% of students with disabilities, are reading proficiently, according to the 2024 State tests. In 2023, the City launched NYC Reads, an ambitious effort to overhaul reading instruction in grades K–5. This initiative, which has now rolled out Citywide, requires each community school district to choose one of three pre-approved reading curricula to use in all its elementary schools; in the past, individual schools had free reign to choose their own curricula, resulting in widespread use of ineffective programs. While there is still much work to do to help schools implement new curricula to their maximum effectiveness, including continuing the job-embedded training critical to the initiative's success, NYCPS must also prioritize improving systems of support for struggling readers. Even when core instruction in the early grades is strong, there will always be a subset of students who need more individualized attention and targeted instruction. At AFC, we continue to hear from families of students across grade levels who have dyslexia or other reading difficulties and have been unable to access the help they desperately need. Often, we need to take legal action to help them obtain intensive private tutoring due to difficulties finding effective reading interventions in the public schools.

Building a robust system of intensive intervention and support for students struggling with reading is a necessary piece of the puzzle. While some schools have already started offering evidence-based reading interventions that align with the approved core reading curricula, many others need to buy

new materials and train educators in delivering the new programs. In addition, schools must have sufficient staff capacity to provide intervention to all students who need it. While schools receive a yearly allocation for Academic Intervention Services (AIS), these funds are rarely sufficient to hire a full-time staff member and must cover intervention in both reading *and* math. In fact, there are almost 500 schools that each received less than \$15,000 this year for AIS. Increasing that allocation and providing additional money for curricular materials and training would help schools ramp up to address the needs of struggling readers.

The City should invest and baseline at least \$17.5 million to help schools deliver one-on-one or small group intervention to more students who need extra help learning to read.

Enhance services at school-based mental health clinics (\$3.75M).

Children are facing a well-documented mental health crisis. School-based mental health clinics (SBMHCs) provide on-site mental health services to children during the school day, including psychiatry, medication management, family peer support, youth advocacy, and counseling. SBMHC staff work closely with school staff to identify children in need and coordinate services. SBMHCs work to engage the whole family and can serve family members at their community location. SBMHCs provide crisis mental health services, helping to ensure children receive a supportive response when they are in need and reducing the use of suspensions and punitive disciplinary measures.

Currently, most funding for SBMHCs comes from Medicaid, which does not adequately cover the range of supports and services that students and school communities need. Supplemental funding is needed to provide additional services, such as consulting on specific behavioral supports for classrooms, working as part of a school's crisis response team, providing support to the full school staff on behavior support, and being on call to de-escalate crises.

Providing existing school-based mental health clinics with supplemental funding to help fill this gap would allow clinics to better integrate into school communities and better support students with behavioral and mental health challenges. The City should invest and baseline at least \$3.75M to provide the additional resources these SBMHCs need.

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

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

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

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

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





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New York, NY 10004
www.alignny.org

**Testimony for Committee on Education
Budget and Oversight Hearing on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal
Year 2026**

March 14, 2025

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Community Voices
Heard*

Jose Lopez
*Co-Executive Director,
Make the Road NY*

Thank you to the Education Committee chair Council Member Rita Joseph for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

My name is Faiza Azam and I am the Climate and Labor Organizer for ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York. We bring together labor, climate, and community for a more just and sustainable New York. We co-coordinate the Climate Works for All Coalition—a group of labor, community, student, parent, faith, and environmental justice organizations fighting climate change and inequality in New York City. Our campaigns move us towards an equitable economy, a resilient, livable and healthy climate, and prioritize justice for low income Black and Brown communities across New York City.

From devastating flooding to extremely poor air quality caused by greenhouse gasses, students, teachers, and faculty often are among those first impacted when a climate disaster strikes. Central to our work is our Green, Healthy Schools campaign which primarily focuses on the decarbonization of public school buildings because we believe that NYC 3K-12 students, teachers, parents, and school staff deserve safe and healthy workplaces to work, learn and play. Investing in decarbonization for NYC Public Schools will save the City millions in climate disaster repairs and make us a national leader in the transition to a clean energy economy.

Moreover, buildings are the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions in New York City so if there is any hope of reaching our ambitious climate goals, we must prioritize building decarbonization. This will lower energy costs providing savings for the city, create thousands of green, union family sustaining jobs and reduce air pollution which can improve the overall health of students, teachers and faculty. With more than 1300 buildings in the school district and an ever-worsening climate crisis, we must be proactive and invest in schools to make them healthier and more resilient in the long-term.

As a coalition, we strongly urge the City to invest \$600M in this budget session for clean energy upgrades beginning with the upgrading and electrifying schools with the schools most in need and centering those in

environmental justice communities. This investment will increase the number of schools currently scheduled to be electrified and upgraded in the coming year. Additionally, increasing the funds for this fiscal year will put New York City on a path to electrify and upgrade 500 schools by 2030 and become a zero emissions school district by 2040. This is our coalition's long term vision for Green, Healthy Schools.

We are proud to stand with labor on this issue and engage union membership in this plan. We see workers from teachers to nurses to janitors mobilizing for Green, Healthy Schools and the need for more investments because they work in these conditions everyday and deserve to make a living without putting their health at risk. This is an investment in the New York City workforce, New York City students, and New York City families, and will make the City healthier and more resilient.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to working more with the Council to ensure our public school buildings receive the investment and care they deserve

Sincerely,

Faiza Azam



**Testimony of the Alliance for Quality Education
at the NYC Council Hearing on Education
Wednesday March 11th 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and education council members. My name is Kaiser, I am the community organizer for the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE). AQE organizes parents pushing for quality public education for all children regardless of zip code.

Quality education looks like early education programs, arts programming, community schools, restorative justice and immigrant support. But as you've already heard here today, these same programs are at risk of being cut. We urge the council to baseline programs at risk of being rolled back or eliminated. Specifically:

- Early childhood education programs, including 3-K (\$112M), preschool special education classes (\$55M), extended day seats (\$25M), and outreach (\$5M)
- Arts programming (\$41M)
- Community schools (\$14M)
- Restorative justice (\$12M)
- Teacher recruitment (\$10M)
- Mental Health Continuum (\$5M)
- Immigrant family communications and outreach (\$4M)
- High-impact tutoring (\$4M)
- Student Success Centers (\$3.3M)

Lastly, we want to emphasize the Speaker's previous sentiment on rejecting the constant focus being on fighting for restorations in the budget instead of focusing on expanding things we know that work like community schools, restorative justice, and smaller class sizes. In that spirit, we urge the council to not only continue funding for these programs, but also ensure these programs are baselined in the final budget.

Thank you.



March 13, 2025

Dear Chair Joseph and Members of the Committee on Education,

On behalf of the American Heart Association, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of investments that will stabilize early childhood education and remove barriers for New York families.

In the first few years of life, a child's brain develops rapidly, building an important foundation for future learning, behavior, and health.ⁱ According to an issue brief from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, children who participate in early childhood programs are more likely to grow up as healthy adults and have higher earnings.ⁱⁱ In addition, according to a study in Science, participation in high-quality early childhood programs can lead to significantly lower risks for cardiovascular and metabolic disease later in life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Research by James Heckman reported high-quality birth-to-five programs can lead to better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment. Investing early can yield significant returns.^{iv}

New York City families are struggling to access these vital programs that yield long-term benefits for young children. Multiple reports published post-pandemic have highlighted the high cost of childcare and the impact on the New York City economy.^v Two-thirds of parents have searched or are searching for childcare so that at least one parent can work or attend school.^{vi} A survey published in 2022 highlighted that nearly 50% of mothers with young children who left the work force cited childcare as a reason for the move.^{vii}

A lack of access to quality and affordable early care and education is a health equity issue. For this reason, the American Heart Association urges the New York City Council to include critical investments in early care and education programs among their top priorities.

The American Heart Association is advocating with childcare providers, families, and community organizations for the following funding.

- **Fund 1,000 full-day 2-Care** seats across all five boroughs – **\$25.7 million**.
- Restore the missing **\$222 million** in funding for 3-K and Pre-K.
- Make the Council's pilot for **full-day, full-year 3-K and Pre-K seats permanent** and available to all children

For more information, please contact: Jake Zychick, American Heart Association at jacob.zychick@heart.org



Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee on Education and in response to the FY'26 Preliminary Budget. The American Heart Association is in support of funding for early childhood education that stabilizes 3-K and launches 2-K. These investments will have both immediate and long-term positive economic and health impacts for New York families.

ⁱ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. May 2016. http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/05/From_Best_Practices_to_Breakthrough_Impacts-4.pdf

ⁱⁱ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Early Childhood Experiences Shape Health and Well-Being Throughout Life (Issue Brief). August 2014. http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2014/rwjf414926

ⁱⁱⁱ Campbell FA, Conti G, Heckman J, et al. Early Childhood Investments Substantially Boost Adult Health. Science, 2014; 343(6178): 1478- 1485, 10.1126/science.1248429.

^{iv} Heckman JJ; The Heckman Equation Project. Research Summary: The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. 2016. https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf.

^v [Childcare Toolkit](#)

^{vi} U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation and Child Trends. Parents' Reasons for Searching for Care and Results of Search: An Analysis Using the Access framework. OPRE Report #2021-39. April 2021. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/Search%20and%20Use%20of%20Care%20Snapshot%20508.pdf>

^{vii} Marshall Plan for Moms and McKinsey & Company, "The Business Case for Child Care: How Parent-Focused Employee Value Propositions Help Companies Win the War for Talent," May 2022.

For more information, please contact: Jake Zychick, American Heart Association at jacob.zychick@heart.org



www.arisecoalition.org

**Testimony of The ARISE Coalition for New York City Council
For the Committee on Education**

RE: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education

March 13, 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am Maggie Moroff, and I coordinate the ARISE Coalition. We are parents, educators, advocates, academics and other stakeholders concerned about youth with disabilities in New York City. We have been working together since 2008 to push for systemic changes to special education that improve day-to-day experiences for students with disabilities and their families and long-term outcomes for those individual students.

We want to emphasize the importance of a number of issues around special education including the delivery of mandated preschool and school-aged special education programs and services; the need for more specialized programs and supports for students with autism, students with behavioral challenges, and students struggling to learn to read; improved transportation; and meaningful parent and caregiver involvement. I'm going to focus my limited time today on the urgent need to make more NYC school buildings accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities.

One of the biggest obstacles that we see to real, meaningful inclusion of students with a variety of needs is the lack of physical accessibility of school buildings. Without fully accessible buildings, the school near where a student lives is often not an option for students with physical disabilities. Students who need accessible locations end up being bused far from home, spending hours a day going back-and-forth, separated from their siblings, neighbors and local friends. For those of us who grew up attending our local schools, we know how important that can be – not just during the school day, but afterschool for clubs and playdates and all the other things that young people do in their non-school hours as they develop non-academic, artistic, community-based, and social skills. Furthermore, during the school day, consider the students in partially accessible schools – and there are many of them - who can get to their classrooms,

but not the music or art rooms, or the libraries and other common spaces. Those students' experiences in those locations are also compromised. Not until our schools are fully accessible will youth with accessibility needs be able to join their friends for close-to-home after-school activities and participate in all that goes on during the school day. Consider also family members with accessibility needs who may not be able to get to their students' classrooms or other key locations for conferences or parent-teacher activities. Accessibility benefits *everyone*: the grandparent who uses a walker, the teacher recovering from knee surgery, the parent whose baby is in a stroller, the students who would otherwise miss out on becoming friends with a student who happens to use a wheelchair.

Five years ago, we worked closely with the City Council and the Mayor's Office to provide funding to make more schools accessible. We were pleased, at the time, that the City invested \$750 million in the 2020-2024 five-year capital plan for school accessibility. Last year, after similar collaboration, \$800 million was allocated for the 2025-2029 Capital Plan for further work. With that funding, the City is working on some critical renovations to improve accessibility in NYC schools. But there's still so much more to be done.

It's been more than 30 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted and our schools remain more inaccessible than accessible – with only around 1/3 of all NYC schools fully accessible. That has to change. We're continuing to call on the City to invest an additional \$450 million (above the current \$800 million now allotted) this coming spring to the 2025-29 Capital Plan. As NYCPS has testified, those funds would enable the City to make 45% of schools fully accessible by the end of this decade.

We thank the City Council for your work in this area and implore you to stay in this battle and to push in negotiations for additional funding to make schools accessible for all students, their families, educators, and all others from the community with physical accessibility needs.

Thank you for your time. We appreciate your partnership in this work and look forward to continuing our efforts together.



Good afternoon members of the City Council. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I am Espa Zigouris, Senior Vice President of Education at Birch Family Services, a not-for-profit Agency supporting children, adolescents, and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities since 1975.

- Birch is a leading provider of special education preschool services under contract with the NYC Department of Education. We operate 8 New York State Education Department approved 4410 preschool programs and provide services to over 1,000 preschool students in the least restrictive settings. Our schools are in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens.
- Our students are NYC public school students. Children are referred to us by the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) because the DOE has no suitable placement options. Our tuition rates are determined by SED and DOE.
- For years, Birch Family Services and similar providers have struggled to recruit and retain certified teachers, teacher assistants, and related service therapists because of the inadequate tuition reimbursement.
- The result was our inability to provide competitive salaries to our teachers.
- This challenge was exacerbated in 2019, when an agreement was reached by the city to raise the salaries of certified early childhood teachers at DOE-contracted CBOs. This agreement failed to include certified special education teachers of DOE-contracted 4410 preschool special education programs serving the most complex and vulnerable children.
- This created a huge disparity between teachers that were included in the parity initiative, with starting salaries for certified special education teachers at \$68,500 for 10 months in contrast to 4410 teacher salaries starting in the low to mid \$50's for 12-months.
- The Mayor and the City Council took decisive action in June 2022 and invested 96 million dollars to support preschool special education students and their families.
- The 4410-enhancement provided equity for 4410 vulnerable preschoolers that the NYCDOE cannot serve. They have received a longer school day from 5.5 hours to 6 hours and 20 minutes, the same as their neurotypical 3K and 4K counterparts. This has provided parents with additional childcare opportunities as well.

- Birch used the funding to raise teacher starting salaries to be on par with the starting salary for an early childhood teacher in the NYC DOE of \$68,500. We also increased our teacher assistant hourly rates.
- Currently, all 4410 providers are at risk of losing the 4410-contract enhancement funding. This funding was initially provided through federal funds; however, we are calling upon the City Council and the Mayor to allocate city resources to ensure this funding continues.
- Failure to provide this funding would create an unacceptable inequity – children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families would not have access to the same early childhood education opportunities as those served by the DOE or other CBOs.
- Furthermore, the certified special education teachers and teacher assistants in 4410-preschools serving the most complex children would not be compensated on par with those in similar roles in the DOE or a CBO providing PreK-3 and UPK for neurotypical children.

The impact on preschool special education if funding is not continued:

- We are concerned that all the progress made to increase staffing in our 4410 preschools and equity in school programming for our preschoolers with special needs would be lost.
- The ability of 4410 providers to provide salary parity for our special education teachers could be eliminated. Preschool special education teachers would again become the lowest paid early childhood teachers in NYC. This is at a time when we are experiencing a 36% vacancy rate. The DOE by their own recent regional needs assessment indicated that there are about 1,000 children waiting for a special education class. Without the appropriate funding, this number will continue to increase.
- The hourly pay for many teacher assistants would be reduced making it difficult to have the appropriate staffing ratios in our classrooms.
- The impact on preschool students with disabilities and their families would be devastating, resulting in thousands of preschool children who have a legal federal right to special education services would be sitting at home waiting for special education seats.

We are asking that members of the City Council do the right thing for children with special needs and their families. You must ensure that the FY 24 budget invests in preschool special education students, teachers, and staff at 4410 CBOs through the continuation of the 4410-contract enhancement so that preschoolers with disabilities get a fair and appropriate public education to which they are entitled by law and the staff supporting them are treated comparably to all other NYC early childhood educators.

Testimony for the NYC Council Education Committee Budget Hearing Presented by Brooklyn Community Board 7

Committee on Health, Education, and Social Services

3/11/2025

Good morning, Chairperson Joseph and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jonathan Martinez, and I am here on behalf of the Committee on Health, Education, and Social Services at Brooklyn Community Board 7 (CB7), representing the vibrant and diverse neighborhoods of Sunset Park, Windsor Terrace, Greenwood Heights, and South Park Slope. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the critical education needs of our community and to advocate for investments that will ensure equitable access to quality education for all our students.

Overview of Community District 7

CB7 is a dynamic and growing community, home to a population that has increased by 50% over the past two decades. Our district is a mosaic of cultures, languages, and traditions, with a large immigrant population and a significant percentage of residents living below the poverty line. Despite these challenges, our community has demonstrated resilience and a commitment to progress, as seen in our successful advocacy for new schools, improved infrastructure, and economic development. However, persistent inequities in education and youth services continue to leave many of our children and families behind.

Pressing Education Needs in CB7

Our testimony today focuses on three critical areas: **school facilities and capacity**, **support services for diverse learners**, and **youth and child welfare programs**.

1. School Facilities and Capacity

While we have made strides in addressing overcrowding with the construction of new schools, our district still faces significant challenges:

- **Overcrowding and Aging Infrastructure:** Many of our schools operate in outdated facilities with inadequate space for libraries, science labs, art rooms, and gyms. These spaces have often been repurposed as classrooms, depriving students of essential resources.
- **Accessibility:** Not all schools are fully accessible to students with disabilities, limiting their ability to participate fully in educational programs.

- **Early Childhood Education:** There is a severe shortage of early childhood education seats, disproportionately affecting low-income and immigrant families.

Capital Requests:

- **Renovate Interior Building Components:** Prioritize funding to modernize and make all schools fully accessible, ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities.
- **New Elementary School and Early Childhood Learning Center:** Allocate funds for site acquisition, design, and construction of a new elementary school and an Early Childhood Learning Center to serve Sunset Park and Windsor Terrace.
- **Playground Upgrades:** Replace outdated playground equipment at PS 971 with age-appropriate, safe structures.

2. Support Services for Diverse Learners

Our district is home to a large population of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and immigrant families. These students require targeted support to thrive:

- **Special Education Services:** Many students with disabilities, including autistic children, are forced to commute long distances to access appropriate facilities and services. We need increased funding for related services like occupational therapy, speech therapy, and assistive technologies, as well as sensory gyms and other specialized facilities.
- **Bilingual and ESL Programs:** With a diverse population that includes Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European families, expanded bilingual and ESL programs are essential to bridge language barriers and ensure academic success.
- **Technology and Internet Access:** The digital divide persists in our community, with over 20% of households lacking internet access. Free, reliable Wi-Fi for all residents is critical to support remote learning and close the achievement gap.

Expense Requests:

- **Fully Fund Specialized Programs:** Ensure all students eligible for specialized services, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities, receive the support they need.
- **Expand Adult Literacy Programs:** Increase funding for adult ESOL and literacy programs to empower parents and caregivers to support their children's education.
- **Non-Teaching Staff:** Allocate funds for additional social workers, counselors, and trained school safety officers to create a supportive and inclusive school environment.

3. Youth and Child Welfare Programs

With 30% of our population under the age of 19, CB7 has a pressing need for youth programs that provide safe spaces, academic support, and enrichment opportunities:

- **After-school and Summer Programs:** Many parents in our community work multiple jobs, leaving children unsupervised after school and during vacations. Expanded funding for Cornerstone, Beacon, COMPASS, and SONYC programs is essential to provide academic support, arts, sports, and STEAM activities.
- **Workforce Development:** Programs like SYEP and internships are vital for preparing our youth for the job market. However, the number of SYEP slots has not kept pace with our growing population.
- **Community-Based Programs:** Increased funding for local organizations offering arts, sports, and academic help is critical to address the lack of public recreation space in our district.

Expense Requests:

- **Expand Afterschool Programs:** Fund comprehensive afterschool programs, including music, arts, and sports, for elementary and middle school students.
- **Increase SYEP Slots:** Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program to meet the needs of our growing youth population.
- **Support Community Organizations:** Provide additional funding to local organizations offering youth and childcare services, creating jobs and supporting working families.

Conclusion

Brooklyn Community Board 7 is a community of resilience, diversity, and potential. However, decades of underinvestment in education and youth services have left many of our children and families at a disadvantage. We urge the City Council to prioritize the following in the FY2024 budget:

1. **Modernize and expand school facilities** to address overcrowding and accessibility issues.
2. **Fully fund specialized programs** for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.
3. **Invest in afterschool, summer, and workforce development programs** to support our youth and working families.
4. **Bridge the digital divide** by providing free, reliable Wi-Fi to all households.

By addressing these needs, we can ensure that every child in CB7 has access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to succeed. Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with the City Council to build a brighter future for our community.



Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Martinez

Chair, Committee on Health, Education, and social services.

Brooklyn Community Board 7



New York City Council
City Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education Committee
Written Testimony Submitted by Sarah Jonas, Vice President of Youth
Thursday, March 13, 2025

Thank you to Education Chair Councilmember Rita Joseph, the Education Committee, and the New York City Council for the opportunity to present testimony on education in the 2025-26 Preliminary Budget. My name is Sarah Jonas, and I am Vice President of the Youth Division at Children's Aid.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. We are leading a comprehensive counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life. We have constructed a continuum of services, positioned every step of the way throughout childhood that builds well-being and prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today our nearly 2,000 full and part time staff members empower 50,000 children, youth and their families through our citywide child welfare and family services and our network of 40+ locations, including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers and community health clinics in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

Children's Aid is a member of the Campaign for Children, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the New York State Community Schools Network, the New York City Coalition for Community School Excellence, and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding. As a member of these networks and alliances, we support their policy agendas. Together, we are on a mission to connect children with what they need to learn, grow, and lead successful, independent lives.

Children's Aid and Community Schools

For over 30 years, Children's Aid has operated community schools in partnership with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS). We believe the community schools strategy effectively removes the barriers to learning that get in the way of youth success – both academically and socially—and we believe this strategy is more critical now than ever before.



Community schools act as community hubs that offer holistic, integrated services that acknowledge the needs of the whole child. New York City community schools use the Community Based Organization (CBO) partner model, where nonprofits like Children's Aid partner with schools and work closely with school leadership, teachers and other school staff to offer integrated support that responds to the specific needs of the students and the entire school community. At our community schools, we work with the school community to integrate expanded learning programs, comprehensive health services (physical and mental health, dental, and vision), and family engagement strategies into the school building.

Children's Aid partners with 20 community schools in New York City. Children's Aid community schools provide programs and services across four domains: academic, social-emotional, health and wellness, and family and home. These programs and services include afterschool programming, targeted academic interventions, attendance support, school-based health clinics with medical, dental, and vision services, mental health services and counseling, parent workshops, family events, and many other services. Key to the success of community schools is having a lead partner who coordinates the programs and school strategy at the school level; advocates for the school's needs; brings in additional resources, programs, and services; conducts assets and needs assessments and supports with data-driven decision making; and has a full-time presence in the school. Children's Aid provides every one of our schools with a full-time Community School Director to coordinate with school leadership and ensure resources, programming, and services are integrated both during the school day and throughout expanded learning time.

Across our 20 community schools, we are implementing a comprehensive strategy to address some of the most pressing challenges our youth are facing, including alarming rates of chronic absenteeism, learning loss, mental and physical health issues, and food insecurity. In response, our community schools are significantly ramping up tutoring services, providing increased social-emotional learning opportunities, connecting students to Children's Aid food pantries, and offering no-cost healthcare through our school-based health centers. This multi-faceted approach is essential to supporting our students and ensuring their well-being and academic success.

In School Year 2023-24, 11 out of our 20 community schools saw improvements in chronic absence compared to the prior year, despite the current high rates of chronic absenteeism across the city, state, and nation. 14 of our 15 K-8 community schools increased the



percentage of youth who have achieved math proficiency on the New York State Math exam. 97% of students at our high schools who applied to college were accepted, and 100% of Spring 2024 graduates at our high schools completed a post-secondary plan.

In the 2023-2024 school year, we screened over 2,500 youth with the DESSA mini-screener across our Youth Development programs, including our community schools. From 1,913 paired screeners, 90% of youth were in the Typical or Strength category by the Spring and 65% improved their score. 52% of youth in the Need for Instruction category in the Fall, increased to Typical or Strength by the Spring.

At each of our community schools, Children's Aid staff serve as one-on-one mentors to connect students and their families with the services and resources they need to overcome barriers to attendance (e.g., food insecurity, lack of employment, housing and transportation issues, and health challenges). Additionally, our community school staff have launched several strategies to deepen family engagement, including increasing positive communications with parents and providing access to food supports. For example, in FY 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024), Children's Aid's Youth Division hosted more than 400 family and parent workshops and community events totaling over 15,800 contacts. These are just a few of the ways in which our community schools meet the complex and evolving needs of young people and their families.

In January 2023, Fordham Institute released the largest study of community schools yet and found that community schools in NYC are having a significant positive impact on academic success (in reading and math) and attendance. This is in addition to the 2020 RAND study that showed other positive impacts, from improved school climate and culture to a reduction in disciplinary incidents, as well as other national research bolstering the positive impact of the community schools strategy. Over the last several years, the City has expanded the community schools initiative, which currently stands at 423 community schools. In this critical period for young people and communities, New York City must continue to make investments in the community schools strategy.

We are grateful to our city leaders for their commitment to Community Schools, including their decision to invest, restore, and baseline more than \$50 million in Fiscal Year 2025 and beyond. However, 80 Community Schools are still facing a \$14 million funding gap, including \$9.16M for approximately 70 campus model community schools and \$5 million for 10 schools in the zip codes hardest hit by the pandemic.



Children's Aid's Charles Drew Campus, one of the campus model impacted schools, has provided essential services since 2014, including afterschool Beacon programming, ESL and GED classes for parents, a food pantry, and a school-based health clinic offering physicals, immunizations, counseling, and resource coordination. Restoring this \$9.16M funding is vital to continue these critical services and support the community.

We stand with the Coalition for Community School Excellence in urging the Administration to restore and baseline the remaining \$14 million to fully sustain our Community Schools.

At this critical moment for young people and communities, New York City must reaffirm its commitment to the Community Schools strategy and continue investing in the programs that empower our students, families, and neighborhoods.

Budget Recommendations for Community Schools:

- Fund and baseline \$9.16M in this year's Executive Budget to maintain essential support for the 52 Community School contracts, which supports 70 schools.
- Fund and baseline \$5 million for 10 Community Schools funded through the NYC Council's initiative to support communities most impacted by COVID-19.
- Ongoing investment is needed to address delays in contract registration and timely payments to nonprofit providers. The procurement process for NYCPS and city agencies must be reformed to eliminate lengthy contract registration, payment delays, and the burdensome bridge loan process—barriers that jeopardize the financial stability of community-based organizations and nonprofit organizations.

Essential Education Programs currently funded by one-year city funding

We appreciate that City leaders made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget last year to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, they funded other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless City leaders act to extend funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded by one-year



city dollars and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July—including 3-K, preschool special education classes, community schools (aforementioned), restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family outreach, arts programming and more, as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Foundation Aid for New York City Public Schools

Children's Aid joined partners across New York City and State in calling for a review and revision of the Foundation Aid formula to reflect the true cost of providing a quality education in today's economy. As a member of the Coalition for Equitable Funding, we commend Governor Hochul's proposal to enact the recommendation that provides a funding weight to a broader group of students who are "economically disadvantaged," instead of the measure for students found eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. However, we are deeply concerned with Governor Hochul's additional proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, which would result in New York City schools getting nearly \$350 million less than they would without these changes.

Given the needs of NYC students, we ask City leaders to urge the state legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive *more* resources to NYC schools rather than resulting in our schools receiving *less* money than they would under the current formula. In addition, we ask state leaders to make the following changes to the formula:

- Update the Regional Cost Index (RCI), as recommended by the New York State Board of Regents and the Rockefeller Institute. The RCI is supposed to account for differences in costs in different parts of the State but hasn't been updated since 2006.
- Add a weight for students in temporary housing and students in foster care.
- Consider additional ways of measuring poverty, such as using higher weights for school districts with higher percentages of poverty, as recommended by the Rockefeller Institute, and adding a cost-of-living adjustment or a higher poverty threshold for certain communities.

We also recommend an ongoing review of the Foundation Aid formula, given the need for additional changes going forward.

Early Childhood Education



Children's Aid is committed to supporting the developmental needs of all learners through our early childhood education programs, serving 729 infants, toddlers and preschoolers across a total of 9 sites. Five of our sites are co-located in NYCPS public schools ensuring seamless integration with broader educational initiatives. Our early childhood team provides responsive, individualized support to children and their families through both center- based and home- based programming, which fosters inclusive learning environments that meet the diverse developmental needs of all learners. We recognize that a strong foundation begins before birth, which is why our programs engage parents early, before birth to ensure that children receive the essential services and resources they need for a healthy start. Our comprehensive approach nurtures cognitive and critical thinking skills, strengthens math, language and literacy development (including dual language and multi-language learners), promotes self-confidence, fosters social-emotional well-being, ensuring every child is prepared for lifelong learning and success.

The Early Childhood Ecosystem: A Collaborative Framework for Success

Our early childhood programs operate within an ecosystem of support, where every element—educators, families, assessment tools, and community partnerships- play a vital role in shaping child outcomes. Children's Aid recognizes that learning is not confined to the classroom. Instead, it is a dynamic, interconnected process supported by comprehensive services that address cognitive, math, language, literacy, social-emotional, and physical development from infancy through preschool.

By implementing evidence-based assessments and strategies, we ensure that children receive individualized interventions tailored to their unique developmental needs. Programs such as Trauma Smart, Bank Street educator coaching, and the CHILD Assessment in partnership with Yale reinforce our commitment to providing high-quality early learning experiences.

A Whole-Child Approach: Beyond Academic Readiness

Success in early childhood education is not just about preparing children for kindergarten—it is about laying the foundation for lifelong learning, resilience, and well-being. Our continuum of support strengthens children's growth in language, literacy, math, self-regulation, and social-emotional skills, ensuring that they have the tools necessary to thrive in school and beyond.

Additionally, parent engagement is a critical pillar of our work. Through home-based programming and initiatives like PICCOLO (Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist



of Observations Linked to Outcomes), we empower caregivers with strategies to support their child's development. By fostering strong home-school connections, we create consistency and stability in a child's learning environment.

Using Data to Drive Impact & Strengthen Outcomes

Our ecosystem is deeply rooted in data-driven decision-making. Tools such as Teaching Strategies GOLD, ASQ/ASQ-SE, and CLASS allow us to measure progress in real-time, ensuring that at least 80% of children meet or exceed developmental expectations. This commitment to continuous improvement allows us to adapt educational approaches to better support the diverse needs of our learners, including dual-language and multi-language learners.

By leveraging strategic partnerships with institutions like Bank Street and Yale University, Teaching Matters, and Jump Start, we equip educators and staff with the resources and training necessary to sustain high-quality, developmentally appropriate learning environments. This professional development focus enhances teacher-child interactions, which are key indicators of school readiness and long-term success.

Navigating Enrollment Challenges & Strengthening Financial Stability

While enrollment challenges persist, our ability to adjust and maintain financial stability reinforces the resilience of our ecosystem. This proactive approach allows us to focus on what matters most—children's development and school readiness.

A Shared Commitment to Early Learning Success

Our ecosystem thrives through collaboration among educators, families, community organizations, and policymakers. By investing in innovative teaching strategies, strengthening family partnerships, and embedding trauma-informed practices, we are ensuring that every child in our program has access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

As we move forward, our focus remains clear: to build an early childhood ecosystem where every child, regardless of background or circumstance, has the foundation for a bright and thriving future.

Recommendations for Early Childhood Education in the FY 2026 Budget



More than 80% of families with children under five in New York City cannot afford childcare¹, placing an immense financial strain on households. This crisis is contributing to a \$23 billion loss in economic activity and forcing many New Yorkers to leave the city. To help stem the affordability crisis for working families with children, the City must continue to invest in the childcare and early childhood system and enrich services that help support parents' participation in the workforce. We urge City leaders to:

- Baseline funding for early childhood education and youth services programs that are only funded through FY 2025:
 - o \$112 million for 3-K;
 - o \$25 million for extended day early childhood programs;
 - o \$5 million for outreach for early childhood and education programs; and
 - o \$55 million for Special Education Pre-K classes.
- Baseline a minimum of \$25 million for Promise NYC to continue serving undocumented families in need of child care.

The City must prioritize providing a truly aligned, comprehensive, holistic birth to five early childhood education continuum for families, and it must be adequately funded and supported.

Immediate action and operational reforms are needed to achieve fiscal stability in FY 2026:

- Process all back payments immediately, bringing all center-based providers to no less than 75% of their full contract value for previous fiscal years.
- Continue FY 2026 advance payments to 75% of the full contract value to address emerging and serious payment delays for the current fiscal year.
- Extend provider's ability to batch and submit multiple months of invoices and maintain NYCPS rapid response teams charged with assisting providers.
- Separate the system supporting enrollment data collection from the system responsible for invoicing & payments and migrate NYCPS invoicing and payments out of the Pre-K system and into Passport by FY 2025.

Meet Child and Family Needs by Keeping the Promise of 3-K for All in FY 2026:

- Reform enrollment procedures so that community based organizations have the option of directly enrolling children whose families apply for 3-K, Pre-K or child care.

¹ Citizens Committee for Children's 2023 report, *The Unaffordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City*.



- Continue to invest a robust level of resources in linguistically and culturally appropriate on the ground and multi-media marketing, community engagement and enrollment efforts for 3-K and early childhood education programs.

Put New York City on a solid path to Universal Child Care:

- Prioritize meeting the full day, year round needs of children and families across all settings to ensure a birth to five continuum of care – supporting both center-based and family child care network contracts that ensure extended day, year-round care is offered
- Ensure children with developmental delays and disabilities can receive mandated developmental and special education support and related services in center-based birth to five programs and that preschool special education capacity meets demand.
- Build upon the successes of UPK and new 3K marketing and community engagement efforts to continuously improve the utilization of services across age ranges and modalities (family child care and center-based care).

School Transportation for Students in Foster Care

Timely transportation is essential for foster youth to attend school, a critical place of stability. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Fostering Connections Act mandate that local school districts and child welfare agencies collaborate to ensure that students remain in their original schools when they enter foster care or change placements, unless it is not in their best interest to do so.

While the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) Office for Students in Foster Care has made significant progress in addressing transportation needs, considerable challenges remain. Students frequently wait weeks or even months for bus routes to be assigned, creating substantial barriers to their education. The primary issue with the NYCPS Office of Pupil Transportation is the excessive wait time between requesting a route and actually being assigned one. To mitigate this delay, NYCPS has implemented ride vouchers, but caregivers are unable to utilize the vouchers until they have waited a minimum of 10 days for a bus route. During this waiting period, an adult must accompany the student. However, since many foster parents are either employed or have other children in the home, the responsibility for transporting these children often falls on child welfare staff. This diversion of child welfare resources is problematic, as it pulls staff away from their crucial roles in supporting family permanency.

At Children's Aid, we have made considerable efforts to ensure that children can attend school, but this has come at a significant financial cost and has led to staff burnout. Staff members often begin their days as early as 4:00 am to transport children to school before continuing their full workday. This not only contributes to staff fatigue but also diverts them from their core responsibilities. Moreover, there are serious safety concerns as staff are tasked with navigating transportation for students during this interim period. For example, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that include transportation as a safety requirement are often transported by staff, putting both the students and staff at risk. One of our Education Specialists was involved in a severe car accident shortly after dropping a student off at school. She was devastated by the thought that the child could have been in the car at the time. The car was totaled, and the employee was out on disability for an extended period. Additionally, just a few months ago, a new case planner was charged with escorting a special-needs child to school when the child broke free and ran toward a busy intersection. The case planner, understandably shaken by the incident, resigned shortly thereafter. These examples highlight not only the financial burden and the loss of valuable human resources but also the dangers posed by the lack of safe transportation options. It is perplexing that this issue has not been made a priority. This is not merely a matter of convenience; it is a matter of safety.

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

We urge New York City leaders to allocate funding that ensures reliable, safe, and timely bus transportation for students in foster care. This will ensure the school stability that these students deserve, as promised under ESSA, and provide timely reimbursement for expenses incurred by child welfare agencies.

Conclusion

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for their support of New York's youth and their families. Ensuring that New York City's students have the best opportunities available



to them so that they are able to realize their full potential is not only the right thing to do but imperative for the future of New York City. We believe that one way to do that is to invest in schools as hubs of coordinated, holistic programs and opportunities that can give youth that chance to thrive.

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



Chilis on Wheels

New York City, NY 10009

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March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the City Council Committee on Education,

For over a decade, Chilis on Wheels has worked to make healthy, plant-based food accessible to communities in need through direct food relief, policy advocacy, education, and mentorship. All of our services are always free to the communities we serve. Through our work, we've witnessed firsthand the incredible impact of providing healthy, culturally relevant plant-based foods to students and the positive effects this can have on their academic performance, physical health, and mental well being. All of the families we serve are families with children who depend on the consistency and availability of public education and the meals provided through it.

On behalf of Chilis on Wheels, our supporters, and every person and student we serve, we urge the City Council to support the following budgeting initiatives in the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 in order to strengthen food and nutrition education and enhance food access for students in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS).

1. Strengthen and Expand Food and Nutrition Education in NYC

Sustain and strengthen the Food Ed Hub Coalition by renewing \$250,000 in funding to maintain critical collaboration among food education providers and support advocacy for policies that increase access to minimally processed and nutritious foods.

An additional \$100,000 is needed to develop a strategic framework to advance the coalition, increase access to minimally processed foods, improve nutritious food access, and expand food and nutrition access across New York City Public Schools. Increase funding for food education programming in NYCPS to reach more students and communities.

Currently, only 190 of the of the 1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding of \$3 millions will expand this programming to 100 more schools, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators.

Please allocate \$2.5 million to establish a Speaker's Initiative to strengthen Food Ed organizations serving NYCPS through targeted funding and capacity-building support. This initiative will provide 100 established community based organizations with \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. Investing in a diverse range of organizations will enhance culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities.

2. Improve Nutrition Security in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS)

Fund ongoing evaluation of key food initiatives, such as Plant-Powered Fridays, to increase school meal participation, improve student and family engagement, and enhance the acceptance of food and nutrition education. Please allocate \$499,878 for this initiative.



A comprehensive evaluation of NYC food service roles and titles should also be conducted to assess career pathways, wages, staffing capacity, and professional development for managers and kitchen staff, with a request for the Comptroller's Office to conduct this study.

Develop Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Food Ed Standards

Please dedicate \$1.5 million to creating research-based, culturally responsive food education standards that will ensure that all students have access to food education that reflects their communities. We also urge the committee to set aside \$300,000 to compensate community-based organizations for their expertise in developing these food education standards and resources for teachers and schools.

3. Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition Opportunities

Support for the Summer Rising and Summer Meal programs should be expanded to ensure that students continue receiving nutritious meals and hands-on food education experiences when school is not in session. A meal period should be included in the programming before dismissal or immediately followed by instructional activities.

Additionally, please increase funding for Health Bucks to ensure that families can access nutritious food. This additional funding would supplement, not replace existing funding for the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Investing in food and nutrition education is a critical step toward improving health outcomes for New York City's youth. While chronic and diet-related diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancers, remain leading causes of death across all racial and ethnic groups in NYC, investing in food and nutrition education is urgent. Please support these policy priorities that strengthen food security and empower students with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed, healthy choices.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and well-being of NYC students and families.

Sincerely,

Eloísa Trinidad, Executive Director, Chilis on Wheels

Chelsea Velez, Youth Program Director, Chilis on Wheels

Testimony for the Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Education Budget

March 13, 2025

To the Committee on Education:

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

Last year, as New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) faced a funding crisis due to the expiration of federal stimulus dollars, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that were at risk of being rolled back or eliminated entirely. However, while many of these programs were baselined by the City, others were funded for one year only- meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

The programs that are now at risk include 3-K (\$112M), preschool special education (\$55M), extended day seats (\$25M), early childhood program outreach (\$5M), arts programming (\$41M), more than 50 community schools (\$14M), restorative justice programs (\$12M), teacher recruitment (\$10M), the Mental Health Continuum (\$5M), immigrant family communication and outreach (\$4M), high-impact tutoring (\$4M), and Student Success Centers (\$3.3M).

These programs were implemented to provide support for the students with the greatest needs. While the loss will be felt by all students in NYC if funding for these programs is not included in the final budget, students with disabilities will be disproportionately impacted. These students are going to be forced to navigate a school system that is actively reducing support for preschool special education despite hundreds of students still waiting for their legally mandated seats; a school system that is actively reducing support for teacher recruitment while simultaneously acknowledging current massive staffing shortages in special education and bilingual education, and projected massive staffing shortages relating to new class size requirements; a school system that is actively reducing outreach capacity despite families consistently reporting being unaware of available resources; and a school system that is actively removing support for community schools, restorative justice, and mental healthcare at a time when, according to a 2024 comprehensive report by the NYC Department of Mental Health and Hygiene, 48% of NYC teenagers reported experiencing depressive symptoms, 24% reported wanting or needing mental healthcare within the last 12 months and not getting it, and 9% reported attempting suicide.

Therefore, we join with the [Coalition for Equitable Education Funding](#) in calling for the City to baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. We also join with the coalition in calling on the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially a \$3.75M investment to expand school-based mental health clinics.

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

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

Finally, we want to mention our deep concern that Governor Hochul's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula would result in New York City schools getting \$350 million less than they would under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive more resources to NYC schools and certainly do not result in our schools receiving *less money* than they would under the current formula.

We thank you for your time, and ask that you please take this into serious consideration as you review the FY 26 Executive Budget.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
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**Testimony of Alice Bufkin, Juan Diaz, Caitlyn Passaretti, and Jenny Veloz
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Submitted to the New York City Council FY'2026 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing
Education Committee
March 13th, 2025**

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 would like to thank Chair Joseph and all the members of the New York City Council Education Committee for holding today's important hearing on Education in the FY26 Preliminary Budget.

We would also like to thank the City Council and Mayor Adams for making significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

We join with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to baseline funding for a host of educational programs facing cuts in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. Throughout this testimony we uplift where cuts must be restored, as well as where additional investments are needed to support our families, schools and communities.

Restore funding to Early Care and Education

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

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

burden of unpaid city contracts; and a host of operational barriers. These issues were chronicled in our report, [The Youngest New Yorkers](#). We appreciate that the City Council and Administration are engaging in discussions on how to address these barriers, and look forward to continued engagement on how to enhance and streamline access to care for children and families.

We greatly appreciated the restoration of early childhood education (ECE) programs in the FY25 Adopted Budget. The inclusion of these critical investments prioritized access to 3-K and Pre-K, supported additional ECE seats, provided access for ECE Extended Day Expansion, supported PromiseNYC and added additional resources for ECE outreach and education. The FY25 Budget also included funding for additional special education Pre-K classes, an important step towards addressing the issue of the backlog of children with disabilities awaiting preschool seats.

However, this funding was for one year only and expires at the end of June. **Mayor Adams' FY26 Preliminary Budget did not extend funding for ECE programs, which are now in danger of being either rolled back or eliminated.** These cuts will have lasting impacts on children and families who already have a difficult time accessing ECE programs. Parents need more affordable childcare options, not less, and cuts to the ECE system (by not extending and baselining funding for this year), will have a devastating impact on families throughout the city. The City must address the barriers preventing families from accessing available care and work towards achieving universal childcare access.

CCC joins the Campaign for Children, the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, and advocates throughout the city in demanding that the following cuts to ECE programs be restored and baselined in the FY26 Adopted Budget:

- **\$112 million for 3-K**
- **\$55 million for Preschool Special Education Classes**
- **\$25 million for Extended Day Seats**
- **\$5 million for Outreach**

Restore Funding for the K-12 Education System

We are grateful that the Learning to Work program and summer programming were funded in the FY26 Preliminary Budget, though it will be important for this funding to be continued beyond the next fiscal year. Unfortunately, many other crucial education programs were only funded for one year in last year's budget and are facing cuts unless they are restored and baselined this year.

CCC therefore urges the City Council and Mayor to ensure the following education programs are extended and baselined in the FY26 Adopted Budget:

- **\$41 million for Arts Programming**
- **\$14 million for Community Schools**
- **\$10 million for Teacher Recruitment**
- **\$4 million Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach**
- **\$4 million High-Impact Tutoring**
- **\$3.3 million Student Success Centers**

Education Access for Students in Temporary Housing

CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

Far too many students struggle with housing instability in New York City. A recent report from Advocates for Children highlighted that in the 2023-2024 school year, over 146,000 NYC experienced some form of homelessness. Over 60,000 (41%) spent time living in City shelters; more than 79,000 (54%) were "doubled up," or temporarily sharing the housing of others because of a loss of housing or economic hardship; and the remaining 5% were living in hotels or motels, unsheltered.ⁱⁱ Housing instability has a severe impact on student's education and overall well-being.

We therefore urge the City Council to support the following reforms to enhance housing stability for NYC students currently experiencing some form of homelessness:

- **Increase the percent of families DHS places or re-places in shelter in the same borough as where their children attend school.** In the most recent Mayor's Management Report (MMR), there was small progress made in increasing the number of families DHS placed in shelter in the same borough as the family's youngest school-age child. However, almost 40% of families in shelter continue to be placed in a different borough from where their youngest child goes to school.
- **Stop the implementation of shelter stay limits for new arrival families with children.** With the pace of new arrivals slowing and a frightening federal landscape potentially on the horizon for immigrant families in New York City, we oppose the threat of eviction and re-placements for families with children in shelter. The City should eliminate the requirement that families with children in grades K-6 be forced to move shelters after their initial 60-day placement and should eliminate any shelter moves for families with children in school, no matter the grade level.
- **Implement the recommendations of the Students in Temporary Housing Transportation Taskforce.** This task force created through Local Law 158 developed a set of recommendations that the city should promptly implement to ensure school stability and regular attendance for students in temporary housing.
- **Increase access to Early Childhood Education for children in shelter.** The percentage of age-eligible children in shelter who participated in Pre-K was around 50% in the most recent publicly stated numbers, a 10-percentage point decrease from pre-Covid numbers. The City should make greater efforts to connect age-eligible children in shelter to Pre-K and 3-K by continuing to make automatic offers for 3-K and Pre-K to families in shelter who did not participate in the application process and ensure that 3-K and Pre-K outreach efforts include a targeted approach to increasing access to and participation in early childhood programs for children in shelter.

Transportation for Students in Foster Care

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, the DOE currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to these students. This is causing deeply harmful disruptions for students in foster care, including forcing them to transfer schools or foster homes to access an education. During the 2019-20 school year, one in five NYC students had to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care. As of April 2022, students in foster care had an attendance rate of 79% and had missed roughly 7 weeks of school.¹

Being in foster care is disruptive enough for a young person; the DOE must do everything in its power to ensure that students in foster care are supported and, at the bare minimum, can get to school. **We therefore ask the City Council to ensure that the budget includes \$5 million for the DOE to provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.**

Support the Behavioral Health Needs of Students

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

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

- **Baseline \$5 million to fully implement and sustain the Mental Health Continuum**, an innovative model that integrates a range of direct services, including expedited mental healthcare, a NYC Well hotline to advise school staff, mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis, training for school staff in Collaborative Problem Solving, and culturally-responsive family engagement to students with significant mental health challenges. This cross-agency partnership (NYCPS, Health + Hospitals, Department of Health & Mental Hygiene) supports students at 50 high needs sites. The Mental Health Continuum has begun pairing clinics and schools, and guaranteed funding is essential for ensuring the program can reach its potential. Funding for this program was for one year only and the program will end if funding is not restored and baselined in this year's budget.

¹ Next 100 (2022.) Why Data Matters for New York Students in the Foster System. Accessed: <https://thenext100.org/why-data-matters-for-new-york-students-in-the-foster-system/#:~:text=At%20the%20same%20hearing%2C%20NYCDOE,investment%20they%20need%20to%20thrive.>

- **Extend and baseline school-based mental health and social-emotional supports at risk of ending. The following programs are essential for supporting student mental wellbeing, but were funded for one year only in last year's budget.**
 - **Restorative justice practices (\$12 million).** Restorative practices address the root causes of behavior, hold students accountable while keeping them in school learning, build and heal relationships, and teach positive behaviors. They also correlate with improved academic outcomes, school climate, and staff-student relationships.
 - **Community schools (\$14 million).** Community schools provide students and families with wrap-around supports and services, including mental healthcare and the types of material and social supports that prevent the emergence of heightened behavioral health needs. This initiative has proven effective at lowering chronic absenteeism and increasing on-time high school graduation. We demand a full restoration for community schools, as they serve as pivotal resources in their communities and provide holistic supports for students.
- **Invest \$3.75 million to expand services for up to 50 school-based mental health clinics.** SMHCs provide on-site mental health services to children during the school day, including psychiatry, medication management, family peer support, youth advocacy, and counseling. SMHC staff work closely with school staff to identify children in need and coordinate services. Clinic staff work to engage the whole family and can serve family members at their community location. SMHCs provide crisis mental health services, ensuring children receive a compassionate response when they are in need and reducing the use of suspensions, detentions and punitive practices. Currently, most funding comes from Medicaid, which does not adequately cover the range of services provided. A \$3.75 million investment would enable up to 50 SMHC to provide additional services to students and schools including, but not limited to: consulting on specific behavioral supports for classrooms; working as part of a school's crisis response team; and providing support to the full school staff on behavior support. These services are typically not reimbursable through the Article 31 SBMHC model. Ultimately, we recommend a long-term goal in the future of expanding funding to all SMHCs in the city.

State Advocacy for Foundation Aid

We echo the call of our partners within the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding and urge the City Council and administration to join our advocacy in ensuring the Foundation Aid Formula is updated in a manner that will support NYC students. Under the governor's current proposal, NYC schools are slated to receive \$350 million dollars less than they would under the current formula. We urge city leaders to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive more resources to NYC schools and do not result in schools receiving less money than they would under the current formula.

Our Collective Call for an Equitable Foundation Aid Formula that Meets Students' Needs is available [online](#).



Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

ⁱ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2023). CCC Brief: From Birth to Age 12. The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City. Accessed: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/from-birth-to-age-12-child-care-and-out-of-school-care/>

ⁱⁱ Advocates for Children. "Student Homelessness in New York City, 2023-2024". 2024.
file:///C:/Users/JDIAZ/Downloads/Student%20Homelessness%20in%20NYC,%202023-24.pdf



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Class Size Matters Testimony on the Preliminary FY 26 Department of Education budget and February 2025 Five-Year Capital Plan for 2025-2029

March 13, 2025

Thank you, Chair Joseph and the members of the Education Committee for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Michael Rance and I am the Research Director of Class Size Matters. We are concerned about many aspects of the Department of Education preliminary budget and the capital plan, but particularly the lack of any funding allocation in the preliminary budget to ensure that schools will be able to lower class size to the levels required by the state class size law, which requires full compliance by the fall of 2028.

Next year, 60% of classes are required to comply with these caps, compared to the 40% requirement that was met this year. Yet the process designed by DOE to achieve this goal is entirely voluntary, in that principals were allowed to apply for class size funds, with no total funding amount disclosed or appropriated as of yet, nor any goal of how many teachers are to be hired. While the DOE had originally stated that an announcement would be made as to which schools would be awarded class size reduction fundings by the end of February, as of March 7 this had still had not occurred.

Most crucially, there has been little progress made so far to create sufficient space for overcrowded schools to be able to attain the class size caps in future years. The percentage of students enrolled in schools over 100% utilization rates actually increased last year, according to the annual report known as the Blue Book, and according to DOE, 495 schools do not have enough space to meet the class size caps.¹ And yet these 495 schools enroll nearly half (46%) of non-D75 public school students. A chart showing these number of schools by district is in the Appendix of this testimony.

While many practical and cost-effective proposals were contained in the report by the Class Size Working Group (CSWG) released over a year ago in December 2023, very few have been adopted.² One of those recommendations was to balance enrollment and utilization rates more evenly between nearby schools, which would improve both overcrowded and underutilized schools, by allowing overcrowded schools to offer smaller classes and more regular access to the cafeteria and gym, while underutilized schools would be able to offer more services and programs, given a more expansive budget. Yet principals at overcrowded schools have been told they are forbidden to request lower enrollments to be able to reduce class size to the mandated levels, even when there are under-enrolled schools nearby.

¹ DOE Class Size Space Analysis 2024-2025 at <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024-2025-class-size-space-analysis-publish.pdf> Those schools without sufficient space are listed as Group 2.

² See <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSiFUcuLOjJ49PLCMptkroFjXBHow2b/view>. Class Size Matters' Executive Director Leonie Haimson was a member of this Group, and a co-author of the report.

Nor has the DOE acted on the CSWG proposal to shift some of the PreK and 3K classes in overcrowded elementary schools to nearby PreK programs run by Community Based Organizations, which have thousands of empty seats and are now threatened with closure by DOE if they do not have 95% of their seats filled. As the CSWG report pointed out, this could free up as many as 1,400 classrooms and more than 20,000 seats in elementary schools in public schools, while saving hundreds of millions of dollars in school construction costs in the process.

There are 266 elementary schools that, according to the DOE, do not have enough classroom space to meet the class size mandate in the law. Of that figure, more than half (54%) offer PreK programs, many of which could be moved to nearby underutilized CBOs to prevent them from closure. Unlike public schools, these CBOs are able to offer extended day and year services, and in many cases their programs are rated higher in quality than those provided by our public schools, according to the rating systems used by DOE.³

Nor does the DOE intend to build enough new schools or annexes quickly enough to comply. According to the Council testimony of Nina Kubota, the School Construction Authority President in February 2024, meeting the class size mandate in her estimation would require 85,000 new school seats.⁴ Yet only about 33,000 seats or less than half that many are funded in the current five-year capital plan, and fewer than 20,000 are expected to be completed by September 2028, which is the deadline in the class size law. Most of these seats have been carried over from the previous five-year plan.

Because Mayor Adams cut \$2.5 billion from new capacity shortly after taking office, a sharply declining number of new seats will be completed over the next three years. While last July, \$2 billion was added to the capital plan to create more space for smaller classes, resulting from a requirement in the state budget that the city must do so in exchange for raising their borrowing limit for overall capital funding, it is extremely unlikely due to earlier cuts that enough space will be available by the deadline in the law. ***Worse yet, nearly half of all the new seats that are funded in the plan are still unspecified as to district, subdistrict or grade level.***

This lack of transparency leaves parents, community residents, and local elected officials in the dark, unable to help identify sites for new schools, or advocate for these sites to be acquired by the SCA. In the past, the active participation of parent leaders, community advocates, and their elected leaders has proven critical in this regard.⁵

Under no previous administration has the SCA capital plan refused to specify where schools are planned by district and grade level. Not only is this lack of transparency unfortunate, given the need to accelerate school construction to meet the timeline in the law, but it also appears to violate two laws.

First, the class size law itself requires DOE to submit an “annual capital plan for school construction and leasing to show how many classrooms will be added in each year and in which schools and districts to achieve the class size targets”⁶ The lack of transparency also violates Local Law 167, passed by the Council in 2018, requiring the SCA to explain where

³ See Class Size Matters, Testimony of Class Size Matters on proposed closures of Early Child Care Centers <https://classsizematters.org/why-doe-should-be-moving-more-prek-classes-to-cbos-to-provide-critical-benefits-to-students-and-the-city-as-a-whole/>

⁴ <https://citymeetings.nyc/city-council/2024-02-29-0100-pm-committee-on-education/chapter/nina-kubota-president-and-ceo-of-the-nyc-school-construction-authority-sca-on-strategies-to-comply-with-class-size-requirements>

⁵ Some examples of the critical participation of parents and local elected leaders in finding sites and pressing on reluctant SCA to follow through in acquiring them to relieve overcrowding are the Spruce St. School and Morton St. School in District 2, and four schools in Sunset Park in D 15, that had been funded for years in the capital plan but never built until neighborhood activists got involved.

⁶ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/211-D>

seats are needed by district, subdistrict and grade level, as well as the demographic data and methodology used to make these projections.⁷ Instead of becoming more transparent after these laws were passed, the capital plan became even more opaque.

The Class Size Working Group proposed many other ideas that could accelerate school construction and the acquisition of more space, including re-activating the Educational Construction Fund, incorporating schools in affordable housing proposals as part of the City of Yes, merging co-located schools to create more classroom space, and ensuring that any changes in school utilization put forward by District Planning do not prevent existing schools from meeting their class size goals.

The Working Group report also pointed out how the SCA has hired only four real estate firms to search for available sites for schools and pays them on retainer; instead, they should be paid based on their actual performance in locating appropriate sites. The Working Group proposed that the School Siting Task Force should be revived. This Task Force, created by Local Law 168 of 2018, met only twice, failed to elicit any feedback from its City Council or parent members, and then released a two-page report along with a spreadsheet that excluded hundreds of publicly owned lots. The Task Force also never analyzed more than 22,000 privately owned sites as well as city-owned buildings, contrary to the instructions in the law.⁸

None of the CSWG suggestions mentioned above have been adopted by DOE. Moreover, since the report came out, District Planning has put forward more proposals for school closings, grade expansions and co-locations, without reference to their potential impact on class size. When asked why, District Planning staff reported that DOE Central had told them not to consider this issue in their proposals.

In December 2024, the Education Law Center and Class Size Matters wrote to Commissioner Rosa, pointing out the many ways in which the DOE has failed to comply with the class size law, most glaringly in their failure to submit an actual multi-year plan, as the law requires. Our letter also pointed out how the DOE's Implementation Report from November 15, 2024 omitted much of the information demanded by the law, including a list of existing schools that have not made adequate progress in reducing class size, along with specific measures to be taken to ensure they eventually will meet the caps.⁹

We also have ongoing concerns with the School Construction Authority's lax governance. As reported in the NY Post, the SCA Board has been comprised of only two members since August 2023, though three members are required at all times by the state law that established its creation in 1998:

“The authority shall be governed by and its powers shall be exercised by a board of trustees consisting of three members....Each appointed member shall continue in office until a successor has been appointed and qualifies.”¹⁰

⁷ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=6714467&GUID=ED9C486B-ACA7-4D5B-8D56-F2EA0A950976>

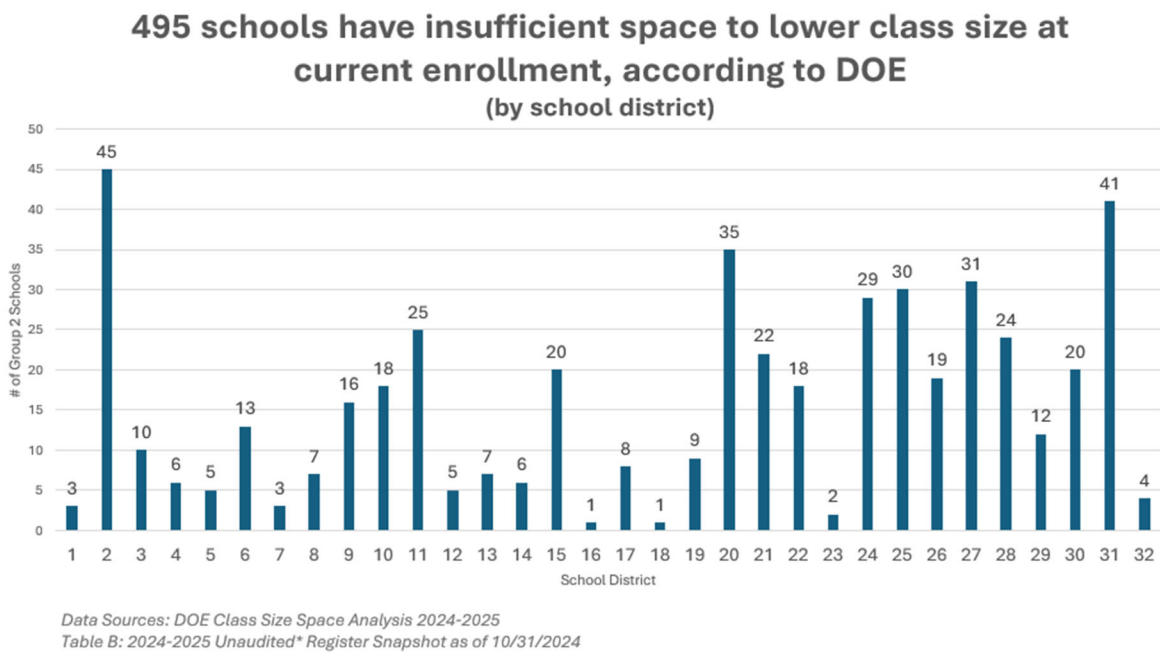
⁸ Class Size Working Group Report, p. 30

⁹ <https://classsizematters.org/class-size-matters-education-law-center-letter-to-commissioner-asking-that-she-require-nyc-to-abide-by-class-size-law/>

¹⁰ See the New York City School Construction Authority Act Public Authorities (PBA) CHAPTER 43-A, ARTICLE 8, § 1727. 3. <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBA/1727> See also: <https://nypost.com/2024/08/31/us-news/eric-adams-fails-to-name-nyc-trustee-to-oversee-billions-of-dollars-in-school-construction/> and <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2024/09/revelation-that-nycs-school.html>

According to the NY State Authorities Budget Office, the SCA Board also lacks a Governance Committee, a Finance Committee, as well as official policies for salary and compensation, time and attendance. Nor does it have a Whistleblower Protection policy. According to this Office, all of these are required by the NYS Public Authorities Law.¹¹

The failure of the DOE and the SCA to fulfill their duties under state and local law and their moral responsibilities to the students of this city need to be addressed. Thank you for the opportunity to testify to you today.



¹¹ <https://abo.ny.gov/annualreports/PARISAnnualReports/FYE2024/Local/ARNewYorkCitySchoolConstructionAuthority2024.pdf> According to this report, the SCA also lacks a code of ethics and a compensation policy for employees, which are apparently recommended but not mandated by law.



Coalition for Equitable Education Funding

Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed budget. My name is Edward Sanchez. I am a CUNY political science student at Baruch College, a recent graduate of New York City public schools, and a youth leader at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, a group of more than 120 organizations advocating for the resources needed to ensure every student receives a high-quality education, with a focus on those who need the most support.

While we appreciate that the Administration and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs that had been at risk of ending due to expiring funds, we are concerned that a number of these programs are currently funded for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless City leaders extend funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

Unless the City acts, here are some of the important education programs and services at risk of funding cuts:

- 3-K slots for thousands of young children (\$112M);
- Preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities (\$55M);
- Extended day 3-K and Pre-K seats (\$25M);
- Outreach efforts to help ensure families are aware of early childhood programs (\$5M);
- More than 50 community schools to provide wrap-around support to students (\$14M);
- Restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (\$12M);
- The Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 high-need schools (\$5M);

- Immigrant family outreach to help ensure families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access (\$4M);
- Student Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college (\$3.3M);
- Arts programming for students (\$41M);
- High-impact tutoring to help students get support in reading and math (\$4M); and
- Teacher recruitment (\$10M).

We call on the City to provide long-term funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years, and to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

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

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed education budget. My name is Emily Van Ingen and I am the Deputy Director at Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation serving the East New York community in Brooklyn.

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

I am writing on behalf of the Student Success Center Coalition.

Student Success Centers (SSCs), are spaces in public high schools dedicated to supporting students through the postsecondary planning process and run in partnership by students and adult staff, have proliferated across New York City and shifted the post-secondary pathways of scores of low-income students of color. Partnerships between community-based organizations and high schools, SSCs are staffed by school and CBO staff as well as Youth Leaders who receive 70+ hours of training to support younger students and peers in college and career awareness, planning, and application activities. SSCs are distinct spaces within their schools, with “Drop-in Centers” for students to access support from adults. They provide one-on-one support to students, host workshops for students and families, and organize whole school college-going culture events. In short, they expand college advisement and exploration for all students in the schools served.

In 2018, the 7 organizations that partnered with schools across NYC to run SSCs formed the *SSC Coalition* to ensure the city’s investment would be continued. Having had to come together for several years in a row to fight for continued funding from the Department of Education, these CBOs decided to formalize their partnership and collectively fight for the future of SSCs in NYC. Those organizations include: Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), Cypress Hill Local Development Corporation, East Side House Settlement, Good Shepherd Services, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, Make the Road New York, and New Settlement Apartments.

Unfortunately, the future of SSCs in NYC – and the over 800 Youth Leaders that have implemented the model over the past 16+ years – is threatened. Despite quantitative and qualitative data showing peer-to-peer college access programming to be an effective strategy to address the college guidance gap.

Last fiscal year champions from the City Council rallied to ensure that \$3.3 million dollars in funding was allocated on behalf of the Students Success Centers across NYC. We are asking that the Council again invests in the future of our young people as they navigate life after High School.

I leave you with words from some of our students:

Mia, FDNY Senior:

The SSC not only has helped me through my college process but also with building employment experience. They have guided me step by step in my college process, from writing my college essay to choosing colleges that were a match for me. I have also been able to become a Youth Leader in the SSC, and I am helping other students find and apply to their desired college path. Not only has the SSC helped to build my character for public speaking, time management and research, but it has made me feel proud that I am helping my peers apply to post-secondary education to be what they want to be.

Our school has low ratings of students wanting to go to college, unfortunately. Whether it's because of their financial situations or it's not meant for them, the SSC tries to find ways through those obstacles, whether through scholarships, through programs, or through persuading students that college is an option.

Besides college, the SSC provides different career options, such as trade school, certifications, military, etc., and makes students aware that they can become more. The SSC really has helped us students try to find and apply for different pathways every step of the way.

Jerrell, FDNY Senior:

Being a youth leader has changed me a lot and pushed me to be the best, even at home. I picked up many skills, and habits, including having respectful manners, and learning how to speak to others. And this job helped me work with a ton of my fellow students.

Also, I like being this bridge where I just help my guidance counselors as much as possible. This is an extremely good job and I wish I could have something like this in the future

Xavier -PATHs Senior:

The SSC has provided the most help to not only me, but to my classmates and friends. Even though we may go to school, not everything is shared, especially the help we need from college. From my experience, I've gained the most knowledge and help from the SSC about college and the things I need for college.

With the help of the SSC I was able to apply to colleges both in and outside the state, obtain financial aid and also help others with their college applications and other research. With this, students were able to be more focused in class and get better grades after seeing the requirements for the college they want to pursue.

Camila- Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep HS

So.. through the college process, since I am a YL, I feel like the opportunities at the SSC offers not only helped me help myself, but also helped me help other people which has always been something that I've been very big on. I feel like it makes the process a little bit easier and it also helps me feel a little bit more secure about what I'm saying to colleges and what I'm helping myself achieve. With my school as a whole, it also helps students understand that there's more than just college after High School. There's other options like employment, military, trade school it's more than just College as a whole which I feel is a stereotype. I feel like it also helps other students think a little bit more about what their options are and how to get there.

Lieny - Brooklyn Lab HS

So in my opinion, the Student Success Center has helped me with my college exploration journey in multiple ways. The events they host and the support they give us directly, but also through the amazing environment they provide us with.

I think I speak for all the students that receive help from the SSC when I say it plays a big part in the school Community just because a lot of students rely on the help that the SSC delivers Our counselors, they're always there for us through the process.

On being a YL: In order to be there for other students, you have to be able to connect with people in a kind of a special way so that information can be heard and understood.

Jasmine- Brooklyn Lab HS

I am a first generation student, I have an older sister, she never helped me out with anything college related, such as the FAFSA application or TAP so the SSC has really helped me. I sat down with one of the counselors for like 2 hours and it was really quick & simple.

My mom also knows that she has someone that she can rely on for any questions. The Counselors are all very helpful and students are always welcomed in the SSC to receive help with anything college, personal, or academic, they are always prepared with computers, printers, water or the counselors themselves.

The SCC is like a whole different place. It feels alive and just very welcoming, and I guess that also helps with the school because through the school it's rare to be offered a spot on a trip and thanks to the SCC I met so many people and got so many opportunities.

Student Success Centers are a lifeline to college, particularly when support in the college process is dwindling across NYC - and the country - and the rates of low income students applying are plummeting. NYC and the Department of Education need to renew their earlier commitment to funding the Student Success Centers and to increasing college going rates for students from low-income communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Testimony to City Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted to the City Council Committee on Education on Mar 14, 2025

Prepared by Melinda Wang, Research and Advocacy Manager of Dance/NYC

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC ([Dance.NYC](#)), a service organization that reaches over 6,000 individual dance artists, 1,700 dance entities, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area. Our areas of service are of special benefit to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color), immigrant, disabled, low-income, and small-budget dance workers. Through action-oriented research and advocacy, Dance/NYC seeks to represent and advance the interests of the dance field. We embed the values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our operations and make the following requests through this lens.

Dance/NYC joins our fellow advocates in support of the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts and dance education in NYC schools.

We specifically ask for the following:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M):** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring federal stimulus dollars and city funds, arts education programs—alongside early childhood, community schools, teacher recruitment, and more—are once again at-risk of being eliminated. We are in solidarity with the Coalition of Equitable Education Funding and call on the city to shift from a one-year restoration to an annual allocation to sustain arts education and other programs currently on the chopping block.
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teachers (\$39.8M):** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, closing the equity gap for at least 379 schools. This can be done in part by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via supplemental certification program (\$4M) or funding a [PE Works-inspired](#) improvement plan.
- **Restore and Enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M):** Build on the city’s down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.



- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M):** Boost the per student arts allocation from \$86.67 to \$100 and require this money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds for arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M)**

Arts education is critically under-resourced and under attack.

For years, arts educators have been forced to make do with less for their students. 47% of NYC schools reported that funding for the arts is generally insufficient.¹ 379 NYC public schools—that’s about 1 in 5—lack a certified arts teacher.² Together, this leaves hundreds of thousands of students without the full support needed for a well-rounded education. Dance education, in particular, has been impacted. Dance educators represent just 12.5% of full-time and 7.2% of part-time certified arts teachers in NYC public schools³. This effect worsens through a student’s lifetime: only 76% of public elementary, 44% of middle schools, and 21% of high schools offer dance education.³

These outcomes are poised to worsen in the current climate. Federal attacks on public education are escalating, with the Department of Education’s workforce slashed by half in just a few weeks. These cuts will disproportionately harm low-income, disabled, and BIPOC students, as many of the layoffs target staff in the Office of Civil Rights.⁴ Already, schools serving predominantly low-income, Black, and Latinx students are the most impacted by limited access to arts education⁵—despite its proven role in supporting student success. Arts programs are often the first to be cut when resources shrink. As public schools across the nation face this sudden loss of support, it is critical for the city government to intervene.

Arts education is crucial to rise to the moment

Instead of responding to attacks on education by cutting the arts, we have the opportunity to take a different approach—one that recognizes arts education as essential to supporting students and

¹ [NYC Public Schools Arts Reporting, 2023- 2024.](#)

² [Department of Education - Arts Education Report 2024](#)

³ NYC Department of Education Arts Office, [Arts in Schools Report 2022-2023](#)

⁴ Turner, Cory. [“The Education Department is being cut in half. Here’s what’s being lost.”](#) (3/13/2025)

⁵ American Academy of Arts & Sciences, [Art for Life’s Sake: The Case for Arts Education](#) (2021),



meeting this moment. Arts education is not *just* optional enrichment, it is foundational to a well-rounded education that engages students academically, socially, and emotionally. Its benefits extend beyond the arts classroom, improving engagement and success across all subjects. This is especially true for low-income students, who are among the most vulnerable to today's educational crises. Research shows that low-income students who participate in the arts are five times less likely to drop out and more than twice as likely to graduate from college.⁶ In this way, arts education acts as a critical defense against larger disinvestment in low-income students and their families.

Moreover, art education fosters inclusion and belonging. Dance therapy, for example, supports emotional, cognitive, and physical integration, and has proven especially beneficial for people with chronic conditions. According to the National Dance Education Organization, dance also provides immigrant and non-English speaking students with a non-verbal way to express themselves and maintain aspects of identity not always supported in a new culture or language. Similarly, dance creates meaningful opportunities for cognitive development and inclusion for disabled students⁷.

Fully funding the larger arts ecosystem is key to supporting students

Arts education sits at the juncture of two concurring issues: disinvestment in education and disinvestment in the larger arts and culture ecosystem. Cultural organizations and workers across the city serve as vital community partners in education. More than 708 arts and cultural organizations partnered with NYC public schools in the 2023-2024 school year. 29% of all reporting schools used external funding provided by these arts and culture organizations.⁸ Findings from Dance/NYC's *State of NYC Dance 2023 Report* reveal that 54% of dancers in NYC are also educators.⁹

Our organizations and workers play a critical role in filling the gaps when educators aren't given the support they need—but we face our own financial challenges. 40% of NYC dance entities report their financial health as weak or very weak, and 58% of dance workers believe they do not earn fair wages.¹⁰ Resourcing the arts ecosystem by baselining \$75 million for the Department of

⁶ Americans for the Arts. [Arts Education Navigator: Facts and Figures](#).

⁷ National Dance Education Organization. [Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting](#) (2013).

⁸ [NYC Public Schools Arts in Schools Report 2023-2024](#).

⁹ [State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census](#).



Cultural Affairs would help sustain the essential role we play in supporting our public education system.

For these reasons, we echo our colleagues across the sector in calling for full funding of arts education for every student across the five boroughs. Our students deserve an education that nurtures their humanity, creativity, and sense of belonging. In times of crisis, arts education is more vital—not less. We look forward to working with the City Council to defend every student’s right to learn.



**Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
New York City Council Committee on Education
March 18, 2025
Presented by Nicole Touzien**

Chair Joseph and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director.

Dancewave is a 29-year old nonprofit dance education organization that provides direct services to an all-ages audience of over 6,200, and connects with upwards of 24,000 people via digital engagement efforts each year. We invest nearly \$1M in compensating artist educators who provide direct services at both the Dancewave Center located in Gowanus, Brooklyn, as well as in all 5 boroughs via our Community Outreach Initiative.

Through our Community Outreach Initiative, Dancewave thoughtfully engages over 5,000 youth with inclusive and empowering dance education in NYC Public Schools annually. With CASA, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and Discretionary funding, for example, we are able to work closely with over 50 community partners across the city to provide our signature dance programming helping to combat the stark reality that our city's schools are underfunded and inequitable.

With only 29% of NYC middle school students meeting state arts learning requirements, schools are hard pressed to find effective solutions. Community based organizations like Dancewave help to fill in the gaps by providing qualified and vetted arts educators to the 1 in 5 schools absent a certified arts teacher. The city's investment in arts and cultural funding, while proportionally small to the overall \$114.5B preliminary budget, is critical to sustaining educational standards and supporting youth enrolled in over 1,800 NYC Public Schools. Such an investment must be protected!

Dancewave is one of over 1,000 arts and cultural organizations in New York City that steadfastly serves and delivers for the people of New York, fully inclusive of our youth. Our work is made possible by -- and will only continue with increased investment from -- the City. **I ask for the committee's full support in advocating for increased and baselined arts and culture funding in the amount of \$75M for FY26** so that we can continue to serve our city's young people. This investment is necessary for the overall health and vibrancy of New York City, and will provide innumerable mental and physical health benefits to our community.

Thank you,

Nicole Touzien
Executive Director



**Testimony of Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council
Committee on Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair**

Prepared by Gregory Brender and Shelby Lohr

March 13, 2025

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education, for convening this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate that the City Council takes the time to hear from New Yorkers about the budget. It is a crucial conversation this year, as the future of early childhood education, the availability of early childhood education programs in many underserved neighborhoods, and the livelihoods of countless hardworking and talented members of the early childhood education workforce are at stake.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY works toward a future where all children have access to quality early childhood education and where early childhood providers and their workforce have the tools and resources necessary to offer the highest quality early childhood education.

DCCNY supports its member organizations and New York City's early childhood field through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, and professional development and training for early childhood educators, directors and staff. We also offer referral services for parents looking to find child care.

DCCNY member organizations provide quality early care and education at more than 200 sites in neighborhoods across all five boroughs. They employ over 4,000 New Yorkers, the majority of whom are Black and Brown women, and operate with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) contracts, federally funded Head Start contracts, child care assistance vouchers and private funding.

Early Childhood Education and the FY 2026 Budget

Mayor Adams's Preliminary Budget Proposal cuts \$222 million from early childhood education programs. Cuts happening at the same time that:

- Families are leaving the City because they cannot afford early childhood education.

- Early Childhood Education providers are losing teachers, staff, and directors because of inadequate salaries and benefits.
- ACS reports a nearly \$2 billion deficit in its voucher program, increasing the need for the services child care centers and family child care programs provide as part of the NYCPS contracted system.

New York City must not enact these drastic cuts to early childhood education programs. DCCNY urges the City to make the following changes to the Mayor's Preliminary Budget.

1. Keep the Promise of 3-K for All

Mayor Adams has repeatedly promised that every family who wants a 3-K seat will get one. However, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget Proposal cuts \$112 million from 3-K, and the City has not provided adequate data showing the justification for this drastic cut.

DCCNY urges the City to:

- Include the full funding for the current 3-K program in the Mayor's Executive Budget for School Year 2024-2025, maintaining the complete number of seats and programs. Minimally, we call on the City to reinstate the \$112 million cut in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget Proposal. Restoring this funding in the Executive Budget, rather than at budget adoption, will give NYCPS sufficient time to collaborate with community-based organizations and ensure all programs can open as scheduled in September.
- Restore the timeline for 3-K expansion so that the City can achieve true universal access in every neighborhood.

2. Restore and Baseline School Day Plus

The School Day Plus pilot launched by the City Council supports a longer day and year in 77 community-based organizations working with School Day/School Year contracts. Because School Day Plus does not utilize the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), School Day Plus does not have the strict eligibility requirements of Extended Day/Extended Year programs.

The flexibility that School Day Plus offers empowers providers to respond to changing demographics in the neighborhoods that they serve.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline \$25 million for School Day Plus.

3. Restore and Baseline Promise NYC

Promise NYC expands access to Child Care Assistance to families who continue to be denied access due to discriminatory immigration status requirements. Promise NYC funds child care for families who otherwise would be denied and partners with community-based organizations

to ensure all NYC families can access these vouchers.

It is an important investment and a statement of the City's values, showing a commitment to ending discrimination and expanding access to education.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC.

4. Restore and Baseline Preschool Special Education

Preschool Special Education programs address the needs of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which lay out the special education instruction, supports, and services a student needs to thrive in school.

Despite the increased need for Preschool Special Education programs, as many children whose first years were spent in isolation due to COVID-19 are entering preschool programs and have increased needs for additional emotional and developmental support, the Mayor's Budget eliminates \$55 million for Preschool Special Education programs.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline this crucial funding.

5. Invest in the Early Childhood Education Workforce

DCCNY is proud to have worked with our partners in organized labor to settle collective bargaining agreements that increase salaries for the teachers, staff, and directors working in many city-contracted center-based early childhood education programs. However, the biggest threat to the viability of the early childhood education system remains the inadequate salaries paid to its workforce.

In almost every early childhood education program type, the workforce is underpaid and underappreciated. The early childhood education workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of women; here in New York City, it is overwhelmingly comprised of women of color. Yet teachers, staff, directors, and providers continue to earn significantly less than their counterparts in public schools.

The City must take further action to eliminate salary and benefit disparities that continue to drive talented educators, directors, and support staff out of center-based early childhood education programs.

DCCNY urges the City to:

- Expedite the payment of collectively-bargained salary increases to early childhood education centers so they can pay the increased salaries.
- Identify new resources to increase pay for the early care and education workforce.

6. Improve Enrollment Procedures So Families Can More Easily Access Early Childhood

Education

Accessing early childhood education programs remains a struggle for too many families, leaving them without access to care that meets their needs, and too many seats unfilled.

DCCNY urges the City to improve families' access to early care and education immediately by:

- Investing in linguistically and culturally appropriate marketing, community engagement, and enrollment efforts for 3-K.
- Allowing community-based enrollment where families can apply for a seat at the center of their choosing, as many families are more comfortable with a trusted community-based organization.
- Implementing Presumptive Eligibility which allows families who are likely eligible for child care assistance to immediately enroll in an Extended Day/Extended Year program or receive a voucher while their official eligibility is still being processed. Since eligibility determinations can take months, new legislation from December 2024 permits the City to use State and Federal funds to serve these presumptively eligible families for the first time

DCCNY is grateful that the New York City Council Education Committee is having this important hearing when so much is at stake for early childhood education providers and New York City's families. We look forward to working with the City Council and the Administration to realize a City Budget that preserves and strengthens early childhood education in New York City.



**The New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Chair Rita Joseph
City Council Hearing on Education
March 13th, 2025**

**The City Must Expand and Protect Restorative Justice, School-Based Mental Health, and Immigrant Protections
Testimony of the Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY**

Good afternoon, my name is Andrea Ortiz. I represent Dignity in School Campaign - NY, a New York City coalition working to advance restorative justice and mental health supports in public schools and to foster a preventative culture of safety based on care, mutual respect, and problem-solving. **The Dignity in Schools Campaign calls on New York City to expand restorative justice by \$80 million, create protections for immigrant students and families, and protect and baseline the mental health continuum (\$5 million), restorative justice (\$12 million), immigrant family communications and outreach (\$4 million), and other critical education programs currently under threat of being cut.** This is all possible by simply redirecting money currently used for surveillance and policing for the healing-centered responses and staff our community desperately needs.

Unfortunately, Mayor Adams' [hyper-austerity](#), [brutal policing](#), and [anti-immigrant policies](#) have been just some of the ways that this administration has been failing BIPOC communities and especially youth. Mayor Adams' proposed cuts are an unnecessarily engineered crisis, as demonstrated by the Council's forecast, which includes \$3B in new revenues and underspending and allows for the full restoration of all critical education programs and needed expansions for programs like school-based restorative justice and the mental health continuum, which we have been successfully piloted and now need to be expanded.

NYC's elected officials must reject the Mayor's plan to drastically cut critical programs currently funded with one-time city dollars. Our elected leaders must help us restore and expand these critical supports. We join the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to baseline funding for these programs so students, families, educators, and our communities can continue relying on them without fear of them senselessly being taken away. These programs are critical to ensure the dignity and safety of Black, Brown, immigrant, trans, gender non-conforming, queer, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

As national and local forces are building power to push a punitive and hate-filled policy agenda, **we call on NYC's elected officials to adopt a FY2026 budget that fully invests in the public school resources and restorative practices that will protect our most vulnerable**



communities, and ensure the dignity and safety of Black, Brown, immigrant, trans, gender non-conforming, queer, and low-income students, and students with disabilities.

We call on NYC's elected officials to:

1. Expand school-based restorative justice and mental health services, including investing \$80 million in hiring school-based Restorative Justice Coordinators in 500 schools. This is possible by reallocating \$90 million saved by freezing hiring on school policing positions, not allowing the city to fill for attrition, and cutting funding for the vacant school cop positions.
2. Protect critical programs currently funded with expiring dollars, including **protecting and base-lining the \$12 million for restorative justice, \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum, and \$4 million for immigrant family communication and outreach..**
3. Redirect money away from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and stopping funding for surveillance technology. Simply by not hiring any more school police, **NYC could save up to \$90M in one fiscal year and use those funds to hire more community-based positions in schools.**
4. Additionally, NYC must do more to protect immigrant students and families from President Trump's mass detention and deportation plan, including strengthening immigration preparedness policies; offering comprehensive trainings for staff, students, and families; enhancing data privacy and security protections; and **passing Intro 798 to eliminate the NYPD's Gang database.**

Our City has the resources to support young people, their schools, and communities. We must shift funding towards the resources and restorative practices that support youth to learn and grow in schools and away from the police presence and culture that directly disrupts learning and violates the dignity and safety of students. Funding for restorative practices and staff will provide opportunities for young people to develop lifelong skills to resolve disagreements, practice empathy, and take accountability for their actions. This will make schools safer for everyone, reduce the role of police, and create thousands of accessible, positive school-based jobs for New Yorkers.

We're calling on City Council Members to negotiate a budget that moves money away from policing young people and towards the resources that make schools safer for all students. We can have just and safe schools, but only if Council Members use their power to shift funding and power to school communities, not the NYPD.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Submitted by:

Andrea Ortiz
Membership and Campaign Director
Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY

OUR SCHOOLS OUR FUTURES

A BUDGET FOR SAFE & JUST NYC SCHOOLS

Dignity in Schools Campaign-NY (DSC-NY) is a coalition of NYC public school students, families, educators, and advocates organizing for a FY2026 city budget that ensures every young person—regardless of which neighborhood they live in or school they attend—has access to safe and thriving school communities. [Read our demands in full at bit.ly/DSCFY26DEMANDS](https://bit.ly/DSCFY26DEMANDS).



1. EXPAND SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS

- ✚ \$80M directly to 500 high schools to hire school-based Restorative Justice Coordinators.
- ✚ \$75M directly to schools to hire 500 community members into supportive positions.
- ✚ \$16M directly to schools to:
 - Transform all middle and high school Deans into restorative positions (\$4M)
 - Access ongoing restorative justice trainings for all school staff (\$5M)
 - Create and compensate Youth-Adult Restorative Practices & Equity Teams (\$2M)
 - Fund restorative justice electives, clubs, and/or advisories (\$2M)
 - Sustain paid opportunities for young people to lead restorative justice practices (\$3M)



2. PROTECT AND BASELINE CRITICAL PROGRAMS CURRENTLY FUNDED WITH EXPIRING CITY DOLLARS

- ✚ \$12M to protect and baseline funding for School-Based Restorative Justice
- ✚ \$5M in baseline funding for the Mental Health Continuum
- ✚ \$4M in baseline funding for immigrant family communications and outreach



3. REDIRECT MONEY AWAY FROM POLICING AND SURVEILLANCE

- ✗ Freeze hiring of school cops and forbid the city to fill for attrition
- ✗ No NYPD-involved programming during or after school
- ✗ No funding for new or existing student surveillance and scanning equipment



4. PROTECT THE SAFETY OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND PARENTS

- ✚ Strengthen Immigration Guidance, School Response, and Federal Preparedness Policies
- ✚ Offer Comprehensive Training for School Staff, Students, and Families
- ✚ Strengthen Community and Government Partnerships
- ✚ Enhance Data Privacy and Security Protections
- ✚ Pass Intro 798 to eliminate the NYPD's GANG database



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Testimony Submitted by

Allison Marino, MSW

Director of Public Affairs

Edible Schoolyard NYC

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education

March 13th, 2025

Thank you to Council Member Joseph for holding this hearing, and to the Committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Edible Schoolyard NYC (ESYNYC) is on a mission to make edible education accessible for every child in New York City. We believe edible education—where kids experience hands-on cooking and gardening—helps kids gain the skills to contribute to a healthy and sustainable food system for us all. By building fundamental social, emotional, academic, and physical skills, kids learn how they can lead the way to community wellbeing and equity. We envision a future where access to hands-on cooking and gardening experiences for every child promotes a NYC of healthy, sustainable communities. Together with public school communities across the city, we're building spaces for kids to flourish.

Last school year, we reached nearly 4,000 students and taught over 2,100 hands-on cooking and gardening lessons across 23 public schools in Upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and The Bronx. We are longstanding partners of P.S. 109 in Councilmember Sanchez' district, and co-located elementary schools P.S. 311 and P.S. 294 in Councilmember Stevens' district. We are also operating mobile education programming, where we bring the essential elements of edible education directly to new school communities without existing gardens or kitchen classrooms, at Brooklyn Urban Garden School in Councilmember Hanif's district. I serve as a member of the Steering Committee of the Food Ed. Hub at the Tisch Food Center at Teachers College at Columbia University, and as the Board Chair of Equity Advocates, which convenes the NYC Food Policy Alliance.

As members of our city's educational community, we take our responsibility to provide New York City's students with access to everything they need to learn, thrive, and build foundations for future success seriously. Our work gives us first-hand insight of the impact that access to hands-on cooking and gardening experiences can have on students' relationships with food, their communities, their cultural backgrounds, and their environment.



The 2024-25 school year will be another deeply impactful year for food and nutrition education in NYC public schools. The FY25 budget for our city, with your Committee's support and leadership, prioritized food education in our schools and continued to commit to making food and nutrition education accessible for all public school students. Across the city, 130 public schools, over twice as many as last year, have been able to provide hands-on, culturally relevant food education experiences to their students through initiatives including the Food Education Expansion program. Over 1,000 New York City Public School teachers have been trained to incorporate key components of food and nutrition education into their core academic classes. Edible Schoolyard NYC has partnered directly with nine of these schools to provide direct food education services, and has worked with the NYC Public Schools' Department of Food and Climate Education to train nearly 580 of those educators on topics ranging from measurements in the kitchen classroom to social-emotional learning in the school garden and civic engagement in the food space.

Teachers are proud to tell us about how edible education promotes students' academic growth by helping them to understand academic concepts. A teacher at P.S. 109 in the Bronx highlighted this impact in action when they told us about the connection between our classes and units in their math lessons: "We're just starting our fractions unit now... It's great they're already familiar with fractions because we did the [measurements lesson] earlier this year." Last year, nearly 90 percent of our surveyed partner NYCPS educators agreed that ESYNYC programs helped their students understand at least one academic topic. We are thrilled with the depth of our impact, grateful for the opportunity to partner with school communities to promote these outcomes, and optimistic that with ongoing support and investment from the City, we can continue to help students across the city to build healthy relationships with food, school, peers, and the environment in meaningful ways for years to come.

The FY26 City budget represents an opportunity to amplify the impact of investments this Committee has made so far in schools as centers for food education, food access, and social, emotional, and intellectual nourishment. Edible Schoolyard NYC urges the City Council to continue to prioritize food education in NYC public schools by strengthening support for and investment in food education programs and partner organizations in this year's executive budget. Additionally, we urge the City Council to improve nutrition security for NYC students and their families, so that they can implement the food and nutrition education that organizations like us teach in their own homes and communities. Finally, we urge the City Council to expand and support summer opportunities for enrichment and food access for our city's students. We are excited to join the Food Ed Coalition and NY Food Policy Alliance in endorsing these key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening education, promoting wellbeing, and investing in health for students and families throughout New York City:



1. We urge the council to continue to prioritize food education in NYC public schools by strengthening support for and investment in food education programs and partner organizations.

- Increase funding available to NYC Public Schools for food education programming (\$3 million).
- Establish a Speaker's Initiative to facilitate targeted funding to support the capacity of organizations providing food and nutrition education to NYC public schools (\$2.5 million).
- Develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS in the design and implementation of food education initiatives (\$1.5 million).
 - Actively include and compensate community-based organizations that provide food and nutrition education to NYC public schools for their expertise in co-creating standards, and professional development resources for teachers and schools (additional \$300,000).
 - Invest in the development and implementation of a consistent evaluation methodology for organizations that provide food education to NYC public schools (additional \$100,000).
- Renew Food Ed Hub funding to continue to promote collaboration across and expanded access to the food education space for NYC public schools (\$250,000).
 - Invest in the development of a strategic framework for the Food Ed Hub which identifies the coalition's role in improving nutrition security, and addresses the coalition's long term sustainability (additional \$100,000).

Between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year, 190 out of approximately 1,800 NYC Public Schools will have received support to prioritize food education programming through initiatives like the Food Education Expansion program. Additional investment will allow more students to more equitably benefit from experiences that these funds make available. An investment of \$3 million would allow for all 190 schools currently receiving funding to continue to prioritize providing hands-on food education experiences to their students, and allow new schools to begin making these opportunities available to their students. We know that hands-on food and nutrition education has an indelible positive impact on students and their school communities - Edible Schoolyard NYC's 2023-24 program data showed that nearly 95% of teachers and school staff surveyed agreed that students felt more positively about school because of ESYNYC classes, 99% agreed that our programming positively contributed to students' emotional wellbeing, and 98% said it helped them learn about each other's' cultures. A parent at an ESYNYC partner school told us that they think that "every school should have cooking



and gardening classes.” We would ask that the City Council encourage NYC Public Schools to maintain this initiative and increase equity in reach across council districts with further investment.

A Speaker’s Initiative specifically designated to support the capacity of CBOs providing food and nutrition education to NYC public schools is imperative for the sustainability and reach of the City’s current investments in food education for NYC students. An investment of \$2.5 million would enable 100 organizations to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula, all catered specifically to the individual communities they are serving as initiatives like the Food Education Expansion grant bring their services to new schools. As NYCPS relies on these organizations to implement the programming required to reach our collective food education goals, it is vital that we invest in their overall capacity to ensure that they are able to expand at the rate required by these initiatives while continuing to provide high quality, culturally and developmentally appropriate programming for each school partner.

In order to amplify the City’s investment in prioritizing hands-on food education experiences for NYC students, we must develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS as they incorporate food education into their school communities. With these standards, we can both ensure that services provided by CBOs are high quality, appropriate, and aligned with NYCPS curricula, and ensure that students’ experiences are able to integrate into and reinforce their academic and social-emotional learning. We further call for the active inclusion and compensation of food and nutrition education providers in the development of these standards, so that they reflect the programming taking place and best practices from the food education field in an equitable manner. Additionally, we call for investment to support the development of evaluation methodology to apply across the food education space so that food education providers can deliver an accurate picture of impacts and areas for improvement to NYC Public Schools regarding programming implemented.

The Food Ed Coalition represents 300+ organizations and individuals who are concerned about food and nutrition education across NYC. The Tisch Center at Teachers College at Columbia University supports their work of providing culturally relevant food and nutrition education to schools, educators, and food education organizations with educational resources, guidance, independent research, and evaluation. The Food Ed Hub brings together different programs from across the city to promote cultural relevance, equity, and advocate for policies that support healthy school food and nutrition education. We ask that \$375,000 be allocated to continue its convening and advocacy work. We further request funding to develop a strategic



framework, with the assistance of an outside consultant, to advance the Food Ed Hub coalition's growth and longevity. This framework would develop a plan to identify how the coalition can improve nutrition security for NYC students and their families, and seek to identify sources of funding outside of City Council.

2. We urge the council to improve nutrition security for NYC students and their families by investing in critical nutrition supports.

- Increase funding for free Health Bucks, the City's longstanding farmers market SNAP incentive program.
- Increase funding to \$100 million for Community Food Connection (CFC) to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC.
- Continue to fund the following Council Discretionary Initiatives:
 - \$8.26 million for the Food Pantry Initiative
 - \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative
 - \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

In order for students and their families to implement the lessons that Edible Schoolyard NYC teaches in our kitchen classrooms and school gardens, it is imperative that fresh, affordable, culturally relevant groceries are available to everyone in our school communities. In 2024, No Kid Hungry reported that 43 percent of New Yorkers experienced signs of food insecurity because of food costs, such as eating poorer quality of food or not having enough to eat. Emergency food providers have seen an 83% increase in visits from 2019 to 2024, showing NYC's emergency food system to be under unprecedented strain. As these circumstances continue to take hold on our communities, we must do more to make fresh, healthy food affordably available. The current funding level for Health Bucks for Community and Faith-Based Organizations has remained static at \$200,000 for several years, which is no longer sufficient to meet growing demand. A substantial investment in CFC—including enhanced access to fresh food—is essential to meet the growing demand for food and to provide critical support for vulnerable communities facing ever-worsening affordability and food insecurity crises. We urge these investments in addition to continuing the council's investments in important Discretionary Initiatives that also support food security like the Food Pantry Initiative, Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition Education, and the Food Access and Benefits Initiative.

3. We urge the council to expand and support summer opportunities for enrichment and food access.

- Contract with schools and CBOs for Summer Rising (or any future iteration of similar) programming earlier in the calendar year to ensure effective integration of enrichment partnerships and adequate promotion of summer meal sites.



- Require the incorporation of a meal period before dismissal from Summer Rising (or any future iteration of similar) programming to ensure equitable access to free summer meals.

Notify schools, families, and community-based organizations earlier in the year of their Summer Rising slot allocations. Currently, this information is often provided only weeks before the program starts, making it difficult to support students and their families, ensure adequate staffing levels, thoughtfully incorporate enrichment partners, and promote summer meal sites effectively. By contrast, the City announces SYEP placement sites as early as January. We recommend adopting the same timeline for Summer Rising to improve program operations, outreach, and impact. Additionally, Summer Rising programs have been shown to allow students to continue receiving nutritious meals and hands-on food education experiences when school is out. To maximize the effectiveness of the Free Summer Meal program through the Summer Rising program, it is crucial to incorporate a meal period before dismissal, particularly for those from food-insecure families who rely on summer meals as their primary source of nutrition.

We appreciate the City's commitments to building spaces for all of our city's students to thrive, and this Committee's consideration of our recommendations on school food, food and nutrition education, translation support, and cafeteria enhancement. Edible Schoolyard NYC appreciates your dedication to these issues and consideration of our recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Allison Marino, MSW
Director of Public Affairs
Edible Schoolyard NYC



edibleschoolyardnyc.org

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education
Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education
March 13, 2025**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the proposed education budget. EdTrust-New York is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to educational equity. We work to attain educational justice through research, policy, and advocacy that results in students of color— particularly Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American students, and students from low-income backgrounds – achieving at high levels from early childhood through college completion.

As the largest district in the state and nation, serving nearly 1 million students, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) is a key focus on EdTrust-New York's commitment to advancing equity-focused educational efforts across the state. Such investments are even more critical this year due to the end of pandemic stimulus funding and potential cuts to educational equity programs at the federal level. The following are our top priorities for the FY26 budget:

Continued support for NYC Reads and NYC Solves: Research is clear that two education indicators, 3rd grade reading and 8th grade math proficiency, are strongly correlated with future student success. Unfortunately, 2023-24 state assessments show that less than half of NYCPS students are proficient in 3rd grade reading and 8th grade math, with even lower proficiency rates for Black and Latinx students. As a result, we strongly support NYCPS's important and ambitious efforts to address these outcomes through NYC Reads and NYC Solves, which prioritize the use of evidence based instructional materials and aligned professional learning for educators. We urge continued and increased support for both initiatives as follows:

- **NYC Reads**
 - Increase investments for NYCPS to have additional capacity to ensure this initiative is sustained and scaled. Funding to create additional support for multilingual learners and students with disabilities is needed to ensure that they have access to the new curricula. For example, some of the current curriculum is still not available in Spanish, let alone other languages, to support the hundreds of bilingual programs throughout the city. Funding is also needed to provide targeted intervention (tier 2 and 3) for students struggling with the core curricula.
 - **Stronger and more sustained professional learning for educators.** A [recent study](#) from Educators for Excellence found that 69% of educators still need supplementary materials to meet student reading needs and 20% have received no instructional coaching at all. We urge your Committee to:
 - Strengthen Professional Learning for all implementation phases;
 - Build teachers' capacity to lead Professional Learning in their schools;




- Sustain district support for at least three years; and
- Provide focused resources to help teachers adapt materials for diverse learners, particularly for students with disabilities and English learners.
- Maintain and expand support for engaging with parents and families (such as the NYC Reads Parent Ambassador program or new family engagement initiatives for NYC Reads), which helps parents to build literacy skills with their children, while learning about the science of reading.
- Maintain and expand support for work on **Adolescent Literacy** to address the needs of older students that struggle with reading in middle and high schools, including the use of Literacy Hubs across the City.
- **NYC Solves:** NYC Solves is based on the same research-backed approach as NYC Reads and is designed to support students across the city to develop the critical math skills necessary for future success. Before NYC Solves and NYC Reads, [only 38% of NYC educators](#) had access to high-quality curriculum aligned with learning standards. At the same time, students experiencing temporary housing or educational disruptions faced even greater challenges, struggling to adapt to inconsistent curricula when switching schools. By providing high-quality curricular materials, combined with aligned professional learning, NYC Solves can significantly improve student math outcomes. However, this will require time, patience, and stability, and we urge City Council to continue to support this important initiative.

Pathways Funding: With major changes coming to state graduation requirements, it is critical that NYCPS continue their important work to provide students with real world skills and early career insights. As a result, we support City Council’s proposed **\$17.5 million increase in funding for Pathways programming**, including Future Ready and Computer Science for All.

Summer Rising: Summer Rising is a popular and proven program that has successfully stemmed summer learning loss for NYCPS students. While we’re pleased that City Council provided \$80 million in funding for this summer, we urge that **Summer Rising be baselined** so parents and students can count on this important program in future years. We also urge City Council to provide dedicated funding for bilingual summer school programming. For many years NYCPS has not provided bilingual programming in summer school to students who are in bilingual programs during the school year. Moving from bilingual programs during the school year to English-only programs during the summer is disruptive to their language learning and can lead to longer term challenges of not becoming proficient in either language.

Early Childhood Education: The need for high-quality early learning programs in New York City is so critical that more families are making difficult decision to leave due to the City’s failure to meet this need. Agencies responsible for provided high-quality early care and education, including the NYCPS’s Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) and the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), are facing funding shortfalls at a time when families desperately need care. We urge these agencies to continue working in partnership to ensure that families have





the necessary information about and access to the full range of available programs and resources.

To that end, we are alarmed by the absence of any funding for early childhood programs in Mayor Adams' Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget. In partnership with the [Coalition for Equitable Education Funding](#), we encourage City Hall and City Council to ensure funding is provided for the following programs:

- Early childhood programs to support thousands of young children (\$112M);
- Preschool special education evaluations, services, and staffing to address the backlog of 11,000 preschoolers waiting for at least one mandated service and more than 5,000 receiving none (\$70M);
- PreK special education classes for hundreds of young children with developmental delays and disabilities (\$55M);
- Extended day seats for 3K and PreK programs (\$25M); and
- Enrollment outreach efforts to connect families with available programs (\$5M).

As the DECE continues its system refresh, we support their recent efforts to engage stakeholders and families in gathering and integrating feedback into the Request for Proposal (RFP) design process for all early childhood programs in the DECE network. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with DECE on the RFP process and offer the following recommendations to build a more equitable and efficient early childhood system that supports all families from birth to kindergarten:

- Offer a flexible contract to early childhood programs that allows the number of seats in each age group to be adjusted based on need;
- Deepen engagement with home-based programs to improve services and provide RFP application support to small programs that may not have the staffing capacity to complete the application. This is essential to support and increase the capacity and services provided for infants and toddler seats, most of which are in home-based programs;
- Reduce redundancies and increase alignment across city agencies that interact with ECE programs. This is important because program owners and directors interface with multiple city agencies, including Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, New York City Fire Department, and Department of Buildings, as part of the licensing and inspection processes. They frequently report receiving conflicting guidance across the agencies. A streamlined system across all agencies would support a quicker, more efficient process, and could reduce the wait time to open a new early childhood program or classroom;
- Move toward pay parity for all early childhood education programs and provide more opportunities for professional development to educators;
- Increase bilingual programs to serve multilingual learners;
- Incorporate parent feedback and recommendations into the system redesign, especially regarding parent outreach and enrollment processes;
- Make explicit efforts to engage parents who speak languages other than English in the focus group phase by ensuring feedback opportunities provide translation and interpretation services;



- Include a focus on meeting with organizations that understand the needs of families who have special needs, particularly immigrant families, and families living in temporary housing; and
- Match parent need with location and type of available program. There are areas of the city with a saturation of available programs, which has contributed to thousands of vacant seats. Conversely, there are some programs in other communities with long waiting lists and families facing child care deserts. We recommend that DECE review current enrollment and waitlist data to inform the RFP process.

Additional Priorities: EdTrust-New York supports efforts to address student and family needs inside and outside of school and urges investment in the following priorities:


- Arts programming so that students can get exposure to the arts in their schools (**\$41M**);
- Support more than 50 community schools – providing after-school programs, mental healthcare, food pantries, and more to school communities (**\$14M**);
- Restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (**\$12M**);
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners, as well as the new class size requirements (**\$10M**);
- The Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn (**\$5M**);
- Immigrant family communication and outreach to help ensure families can receive information about their child’s school in a language and mode they can access (**\$4M**);
- High-impact tutoring to help students get the support they need in reading and math (**\$4M**);
- Student Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college (**\$3.3M**);
- Behavioral support services not currently funded through school-based mental health clinics, such as training for school staff (**3.75M**); and
- School accessibility improvements, adding **\$450M** to the five-year Capital Plan to ensure students with physical disabilities are not excluded from schools due to inaccessibility.

We join with the [Coalition for Equitable Education Funding](#) in calling for the City to baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. We also join with the coalition in calling on the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Foundation Aid

Finally, we want to mention our deep concern that Governor Hochul’s proposed changes to the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula would result in New York City schools getting \$350 million less than they would under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive





more resources to NYC schools and certainly do not result in our schools receiving *less money* than they would under the current formula.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our testimony.



Testimonial Letter to New York City Council Committee on
Education
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair
Budget Education Hearing

March 13, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you to Chair Joseph and the New York City Council Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Janice Weinman-Shorenstein, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Education Through Music (ETM), a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing music education to underserved students in under-resourced Title 1 schools in New York City.

For over 30 years, ETM has been committed to improving the quality of education in New York City public schools by integrating music education into the core curriculum. ETM currently partners with 54 schools to support 20,000 students each year in all five boroughs and in almost every community in the city. We provide trained music teachers, instruments, a comprehensive music curriculum, and one hundred hours of teacher professional development to ensure a thriving music program at all of our partner schools.

In our 33 years, we have offered 8 million hours of music education to 300,000 students in more than 150 partner schools. In New York City, there is a staggering lack of music education programming: **54% of city schools do not have a full-time certified music teacher on staff.**

Music classes are regularly cited by students as their favorite subject, and critical research supporting the importance of these core subjects has grown in recent years. Music programming enhances students' reading [abilities](#), improves [attendance](#), and fosters [social](#) and [emotional](#) learning. Sadly, in the early 2000s, art and music classes were [eliminated](#) in many schools, largely due to the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act, which mandated schools to prioritize reading and math at the expense of other subjects. However, the City's most recent *Arts in Schools* [report](#) has shown a slow but steady increase in arts and music programs in the decade leading up to the pandemic. Following several COVID-influenced school years, arts and music education appears to be making a comeback.

These improvements, however, may be short-lived, as federal music education funding is at risk due to the new administration's promise to [eliminate](#) the U.S. Department of Education and cut educational funding and services.

While all students benefit from arts and music education, schools serving low-income students are most likely to lose these programs when programmatic and Title 1 funding are

[cut](#). Parent Teacher Associations in higher-income schools can often raise private [funds](#) to ensure that vital arts and music programs remain, even during times of budget constraints. However, students—particularly children of color—attending schools in lower-income areas depend on state and city funding to prevent these critical programs from being eliminated.

ETM's goal is to ensure that children in underserved schools continue to receive music programming despite the federal threats to eliminate educational funding.

We greatly appreciate the Council's generous support of Education Through Music. This year, given the budget challenges, ETM is requesting \$200,000 in Speaker funding to help us prioritize music education and support initiatives that increase the number of students receiving a comprehensive music education program.

We thank the New York City Council and the members who support Education Through Music. Through our continued partnership together, we can ensure that every child in New York has access to the transformative power of music education.

Thank you for your time and for your continued support of music education.

###



Testimony of Educational Alliance
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Councilmember Rita Joseph, Chair
March 13, 2025

Educational Alliance is a settlement house with community centers located throughout the Lower East Side and East Village offering individuals and families high-quality, multi-generational programs and services to enhance their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities. Among the services we offer, Educational Alliance is a long-standing provider of high-quality early childhood education programs; we were among the first Head Start programs in the nation, and subsequently one of the first Early Head Start programs. Additionally, we are the contracted provider in three Community Schools and operate youth development programming through DYCD contracts in five schools.

We are deeply concerned that several key programs previously included in the City's education budget were left out of the Mayor's preliminary budget this year. As a provider, we are significantly impacted by delays in contracting with DOE -- our FY25 contracts have not even been registered by DOE for either our early childhood or Community Schools programs. Without action, we believe the programs outlined below are at risk of being significantly rolled back or eliminated entirely. Considering uncertain funding from our federal contracts and extreme delays in payments from DOE, we urge City leaders to take swift action on the following priorities that directly impact the programs we offer at Educational Alliance:

- Restore \$197 million to the DOE, including \$112 million for 3-K programs, and \$55 million for preschool special education (\$55m),
- Increase investments in childcare infrastructure through funding for 2 Care child care for 2-year olds, by starting with a \$25.7 million investment to serve 1,000 children
- Complete the path to pay parity for the early childhood education workforce
- Restore \$14 million for Community Schools
- Restore \$3.3 million for Student Success Centers
- Restore previous cuts to City Council Mental Health initiatives

Early Childhood Education: PreK and 3K

Universal early childhood education is a clear response to New York City's growing unaffordability crisis, making recent funding cuts particularly shortsighted when families struggle to raise children in the City. And yet, early childhood program providers like EA face numerous challenges, including issues with centralized enrollment systems, special education service backlogs, contract and reimbursement delays, and persistent salary disparities. The City must make critical investments to early childhood programming to stabilize the sector now and in the future. We urge the City to:

- **Restore the \$112 million for 3K programs and \$55 million for preschool special education to strengthen the City's early childhood system and support families who depend on these services.** Across the City, thousands of children eligible for special education services face

You belong here.

extended delays due to provider backlogs, making additional funding for preschool special education essential. The City must put more funding towards preschool special education, rather than allowing this cut to persist.

- **Allow contracted CBO-early childhood education providers to directly enroll families in our programs.** The current centralized enrollment process creates significant problems for both providers and families. CBOs, which serve as trusted local resources, cannot directly enroll families who naturally turn to them, instead having to refer them to the DOE. This disconnection harms providers financially when enrollment targets aren't met and damages our credibility with families unable to directly secure spots in neighborhood programs.
- **Continue investing in universal childcare by funding 2Care—free childcare for 2-year-olds—beginning with a \$25.7 million investment to serve 1,000 children.**
- **Complete the path to pay parity for the early childhood education workforce.** Pay parity remains a critical issue for us, as our PreK and UPK contracts reimburse us for teacher wages at a much lower rate than teachers in the same roles earn in DOE schools. Despite some salary improvements in recent labor contracts, not all teachers have benefited. This persistent wage gap severely impacts our ability to recruit, hire, and retain qualified educators, making it imperative for the city to continue working toward closing this pay disparity to maintain quality early childhood education.

Community Schools

As a community school partner organization, Educational Alliance provides social work and case management services in each of our three community schools, as well as programming to address both physical and social-emotional needs of children and their caregivers. Additionally, we strive to provide academic support to ensure our students are on track as they progress in school. For example:

- Through our partnership at PS 140, the community schools program has implemented the High 5s program for kindergarten students. High 5s is an evidence-based program designed to boost children's acquisition of math skills and provides a bridge to the first-grade math curriculum. We also offer test preparation for students in older grades and professional support for teaching staff.
- At Tompkins Square Middle School (TSMS), our community schools program has significantly enhanced student learning in mathematics and preparation for high school. Educational Alliance provides critical services in the school including afterschool math instruction and tutoring that complements the curricula in grades 6-8, and a common core algebra course for 8th grade students, positioning them to take advanced math courses in high school. We also offer a variety of enrichment activities to enhance student learning. Because of these efforts, TSMS is one of the highest scoring middle schools in math exams within District 1 and beyond.
- At PS 64, we are improving students' literacy through a reading program in grades k-2, and book clubs for 4th and 5th grade students. We focus on improving attendance for all students and offer early-bird drop off and other incentives. We provide parent engagement opportunities as well as classroom supports throughout the school day.

Consistent and sustainable funding is critical to developing authentic school-community partnerships. **We urge the City Council to restore \$14 million for Community Schools and restore previous cuts to mental health initiatives that support students.**

Good morning members of the City Council. My name is Marielys Divanne and I am the Executive Director of Educators for Excellence - New York, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today.

I am here to express my strong and unwavering support for NYC Reads and NYC Solves—initiatives that represent bold and necessary improvements over the previous system.

Before these initiatives, only **38% of educators** had access to high-quality curriculum aligned with learning standards. **Two-thirds of Black and Latino students** were behind in reading and math. Students experiencing temporary housing or educational disruptions faced even greater challenges, struggling to adapt to inconsistent curricula when switching schools.

NYC Reads and NYC Solves marked a turning point.

These initiatives require time, patience, and stability, but they are grounded in extensive research. High-quality curricular materials, combined with aligned professional learning, significantly improve student outcomes. This approach has already proven successful in states like Mississippi, Tennessee, and North Carolina, where consistent implementation led to substantial gains in reading scores—when given at least five years to take hold.

Today, as an advocate representing over 17,000 New York City teachers, I urge you to stay the course and strengthen your support for NYC Reads and NYC Solves so that New York City can become a national model for reading and math success. New York City's teachers, students, and families need this.

We have been surveying teachers throughout the year on these initiatives, and the results are promising. In December, we surveyed hundreds of educators about NYC Reads, and the findings were clear:

- The vast majority reported positive or neutral perceptions of their new materials and their impact on student learning.
- Phase 1 teachers, who had more time with the curriculum, expressed even greater confidence, highlighting the importance of stable, well-supported implementation.

Let me repeat that – more time with the curriculum leads to more confidence for our teachers, and by extension, better results for our students. We need to stick with this.

Beyond maintaining stability, we also need City Council to double down on supporting sustained and expanded professional learning—now and in the future. Reading and math instruction, the foundation of student success, are too important to shortchange.

Finally, ongoing collaboration with educators, parents, and community leaders is essential. We've been impressed with Chancellor Aviles-Ramos's leadership, particularly in how she has engaged educators directly throughout this transition. Over the last several months, we have

seen her actively listening to teachers and acting on their feedback. We urge this level of engagement to continue.

NYC Reads and NYC Solves were long overdue. Now, we need all city leaders, including members of this city council, to stay the course, strengthen support, and keep educators' voices at the center of this shift.

Thank you.



SASKIA TRAILL

PRESIDENT & CEO EXPANDED SCHOOLS

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE & THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FISCAL YEAR 2026 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING: MARCH 13, 2025

My name is Saskia Trill and I am the President/CEO of ExpandedED Schools. Thank you to Speaker Adams, Chair Joseph, Chair Brannan, the Committee on Finance, as well as the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to testify here today. It's a pleasure to work collaboratively with you all to create effective strategies to bolster the efficacy of our educational infrastructure across the City in a way that is equitable and culturally responsive.

I would like to begin by thanking the Council, this Committee, and Chair Joseph for the \$4M investment in High-Impact Tutoring (HIT) in last year's budget process, which is supporting HIT programming happening right now throughout our City. This investment scored a significant win for students across New York City, allowing them access to valuable, research-based instructional support. However, current funding for HIT programming will expire in June and unless funding is extended into the FY26 budget students may lose access to this valuable resource.

Since 2022, ExpandedED Schools in partnership with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has been supporting the implementation of a citywide tutoring initiative¹. As New York City youth (and youth across the country) emerged from the sudden shift to remote learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, data emerged that highlighted substantial delays in the mastery of particular math and literacy concepts². In response to this data, research emerged out of Brown University's Annenberg Institute that offered an answer: a unique and intentional approach to instructional support that combines highly-trained staff, small group/individualized attention, high quality instructional materials, and frequent repetition that researchers coined High-Impact Tutoring³.

Researchers at the Annenberg Institute found that HIT - defined as tutoring that happens "more than three days per week for a minimum of 90 minutes per week" with no more than 4 students at a time per tutor - is one of the few school-based intervention models that yields large positive impacts on student achievement in literacy and math. To their credit, our municipal partners were forward thinking. The City engaged in a robust planning process to develop the right implementation model of HIT for New York City schools and were intentional about ensuring that students who have the least access to high-quality tutoring with quality implementation were the ones prioritized to receive it.

¹ <https://gothamist.com/news/new-tutoring-initiative-will-combat-pandemic-learning-loss-at-nyc-schools>

² <https://cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/5-4.pdf?m=1651690491>

³ https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Design_Principles_1.pdf



To implement the plan, NYCPS committed \$15M in COVID-relief federal ESSER funds to be spent in \$5M increments over three years, alongside a consortium of philanthropic entities that committed private funds.⁴ Both the consortium of private funders and NYCPS leaned on ExpandedED's experience as an intermediary to develop a HIT model for NYC schools.

Ultimately, what that collective energy has produced over the last two and a half school years has been a HIT model that provides intensive, individualized academic support to students in K-2 Literacy and 6-8 Math to facilitate content mastery. The target population for the New York City HIT initiative are students who are just below grade level. Tutoring in our initiative can be delivered in various modalities including virtual and hybrid sessions.

In spring of 2024, NYCPS informed us that the final \$5M in ESSER funds for 2024-25 was no longer available. As a result, we advocated to the Council and this Committee and were able to secure a \$4M investment for tutoring support for the 2024-25 school year. With these funds we were able to continue scaling access to HIT across the city **expanding from 80 schools in 2023-24 to 106 schools in 2024-25**. Schools have also contributed funds to supplement central public funds, and private funders have continued to support quality implementation and evaluation to ensure a high-impact program.

The results of the first two and a half years of implementation have been strong. To date:

- **11,391 students have received tutoring overall - 3,302 in school year 2022-2023, 3,845 in school year 2023-2024, and 4,244 in school year 2024-2025.**
 - **99% of students identify as students of color, and the cohort has significantly higher percentages of students in temporary housing, students with disabilities and multilingual learners than city averages.**
- **HIT students in math tutoring exhibited a median progress of 146% on i-Readys typical annual growth scale, equating to nearly 1.5 years progress in a single year.**
 - **37% of these students achieved 200% or more, equivalent to two years worth of progress within one year.**
- **For students participating in ELA tutoring, the percentage of students at or above benchmark, according to Acadience, increased from 18% to 32%, a 14 percentage point increase.**

According to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) New York students remain below pre-pandemic levels in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math, which are critical indicators of future academic success. Furthermore, NAEP scores show that more than half of Black and Latinx

⁴ <https://heckscherfoundation.org/grantee/expanded-schools/>



students in New York scored ‘Below Basic’ in both fourth grade reading and eighth grade math⁵. These scores underline the reality that New York City students have not recovered from pandemic era learning losses and are in desperate need of academic support. The New York City HIT initiative provides access to a research-based intervention method that has been shown to significantly boost academic outcomes for the at-risk student populations who need this support most.

ExpandedED Schools is seeking the Council’s support in advocating for \$4M to be included in the FY26 New York City budget so schools and school leaders can continue implementation of this effective model. The \$10M initial investment by NYCPS from ESSER and the \$4M city investment in FY25 showed the positive impact of implementing HIT broadly in New York City. A similar \$4M investment was not included in the FY26 Preliminary Budget and we respectfully request your support in securing \$4M in central public funds for this important initiative in FY26.

We also stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded by one-year city dollars and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July. Along with high-impact tutoring, we call for funding for 3-K, preschool special education classes, community schools, restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family outreach, arts programming, Student Success Centers, and more, as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Thank you again to Speaker Adams, Chair Brannan, Chair Joseph and the rest of your respective committees for holding this hearing and for all the work that you do for children and families across the City. I look forward to continuing to be a partner to you when it comes to being of service to young people and their communities.

Saskia Traill

Email: straill@expandedschools.org





**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education
Re: Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget - Education
March 13, 2025**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the proposed education budget. My name is Debra Freeman, and I am testifying on behalf of Four Freedoms Democratic Club as Chair of its Education Working Group.

We support increased funding for New York City public schools and sustaining vital education programs. At this challenging time with our schools anticipating devastating cuts in federal funding and struggling to address student mental health challenges and the overwhelming needs from record levels of homeless and immigrant students, the budget should prioritize public school funding. Increased funding is needed to prepare students for success and stabilize the economy during this time of chaos.

We appreciate that Mayor Adams and the City Council made investments in the Fiscal 2025 budget to sustain many essential education programs funded with expiring federal stimulus funding. However, we are concerned that many essential programs were funded for one year only and will be cut if the City fails to extend funding when it expires in June.

Unless the City takes action, programs at risk of severe cuts include: arts programming that expands student access to the arts and supports social-emotional wellbeing, enhances academic achievement, and provides preparation for creative careers (\$41 million); 3-K programs for thousands of students (\$112 million); extended day 3-K and pre-K programs (\$25 million); over 50 community schools providing wrap-around services (\$14 million); teacher recruitment (\$10 million); mental healthcare for high needs schools through the Mental Health Continuum (\$5 million); immigrant family communication and outreach (\$4 million); restorative justice programs resolving conflicts without suspension (\$12 million); high-impact tutoring providing necessary academic support (\$4 million); and Student Success Centers preparing students for college (\$3.3 million).

As a member of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (the "Coalition"), we join the Coalition in asking the City to baseline funding in the Fiscal 2026 budget for essential programs previously funded with federal stimulus funding that were funded for one year only so students can continue to benefit from these programs.

We also ask the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, including: expanded access to arts education ensuring that every school has at least one certified arts teacher; enhanced literacy support to ensure that every student learns to read; and increased availability of school-based mental health clinics to address the mental health crisis.

In addition, we are deeply concerned that Governor Hochul's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid funding formula would result in NYC schools getting \$350 million less than under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor and the State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula result in increased resources for NYC public schools addressing the great needs and high costs for NYC schools and certainly do not result in less money than under the current formula.

With drastic changes to federal education funding anticipated and proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula threatening state funding, this is not a normal budget season. We ask you to do everything possible to increase investment in NYC public schools meeting this challenging moment. Our students are worth the investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your support.



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**Testimony of Christina Karahisarlidis
Mid-Atlantic Program Manager, Generation Citizen
March 13th, 2025
New York City Council**

Good afternoon Chair Joseph, Chair Brannan, and members of the Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Generation Citizen ("GC"). My name is Christina Karahisarlidis and I am a Program Manager at Generation Citizen. Through our Community-Based Civics curriculum, middle and high school students apply social studies learning to the real world by studying and advocating on an issue of importance in their communities. Before joining GC, I was a teacher in the NYC DOE for nearly a decade and it's an honor to be here today alongside dedicated educators, hardworking changemakers, and inspiring students.

Thank you for fighting for a stronger budget for New York City DOE schools. Increasing the current level of education funding is crucial to preserving critical services to our pre-kindergarten to 12th grade students, especially as we combat learning loss, work to improve the mental health of our young people, and ensure our students are properly prepared for the world they are going to enter when they leave secondary education.

Generation Citizen is thankful for the Council's continued investment this year in our programming and youth civics education through the *Civics Education in New York City Schools Initiative*. The City Council has generously funded this initiative for Generation Citizen since 2017, originally meant to support our programming in 125 classrooms. Since then, our footprint in New York City has more than doubled citywide. In this 2024-2025 school year, we are serving approximately 266 classrooms and over 6,650 students in 44 schools across New York City in all five boroughs. To ensure that we can continue and maintain our growth, Generation Citizen respectfully requests an increase of \$200,000 for the initiative to be funded at \$700,000 in FY26 to support this significant and continued expansion of programming across the City and the ever-increasing demand for our services.

In my previous role as a high school English teacher in Title I schools in the New York City DOE, I saw firsthand the detrimental effect that decreasing school budgets has on our students. My students' emotional and learning needs were not always met because there was not always enough staff at hand. If we see more budget cuts, that could mean that even more students may not be able to meet with a school counselor, students with disabilities and English language acquisition needs may not receive the services they



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need, and our immigrant population may not receive a school placement in a proper time frame. At a time when federal funding support is quite uncertain, we need New York City to continue to lead and to ensure that our schools, where our youth spend much of their time, are properly funded and supported.

While we are glad to see the Administration has allocated some resources for financial literacy and professional development skills, civic education is an area that has long been underfunded in fiscal support and understated as a learning priority.. How can we expect our young people to effect positive change in society if they don't know how to advocate for the needs of their communities? We at GC believe that public service and civic engagement should be prioritized as cornerstones of the educational curriculum. We believe that more can be done to ensure our youth are as prepared as possible for their adult lives.

Today, we are thrilled to present the work of one of our partners, Global Learning Collaborative in Council Member Brewer's District. Social Studies teacher, Martin Gloster, and high school students, Djeneba Toure, Alix Torres, Lorens Rodriquez, Lauren Manca, and Soleidy Marte, will share issues and concerns that emerged from their implementation of Generation Citizen's Community-Based Civics curriculum this year in relation to the proposed budget cuts.

Since working at Generation Citizen, it has been a privilege seeing our young people advocate for themselves and each other through their Community-Based Civics projects, on issues such as this. Across the City, Generation Citizen students have advocated on a range of issues, including school-based campaigns like ensuring advocating for healthy school lunch options and adding more bathroom stalls in their schools. Others focused on community concerns like addressing the high cost of living, the lack of affordable housing in New York City, the need to close illegal smoke shops, combatting subway surfing, and addressing racism and discrimination in their schools.

Generation Citizen is a 15 year-old national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to engaging youth in our democracy by bringing civics education into the classroom through Community-Based Civics. Community-Based Civics "helps students understand exactly how governments function and how they can make a difference in the system" (generationcitizen.org). It is different from normative, knowledge-based civic education in the same way that taking any "hands-on," project-based, or experiential course differs from reading a textbook. Students learn about democratic structures and processes by directly engaging with them, as well as with each other, to address one or more issues they care about, which are impacting their community.



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Generation Citizen is incredibly thankful for the City Council's renewed funding despite a myriad of challenges and budgetary concerns in the last few years. Generation Citizen hopes to continue partnering with the Council and the Department of Youth and Community Development to continue bringing high quality civics education to our City schools. Thank you for considering this testimony. I can be reached at ckarahisarlidis@generationcitizen.org with any questions or comments.



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Testimonies of High School Students and Educator from Global Learning Collaborative

March 13, 2025

New York City Council Committee on Education

Testimony of Martin Gloster, Social Studies Teacher:

Good Afternoon Council Members,

My name is Martin Gloster and I teach a variety of social studies classes at The Global Learning Collaborative, which is a small public high school in the Brandeis campus on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

I am here in partnership with the fantastic Generation Citizen action community-based civics program and as a very proud teacher, to support these five incredible students to my right as they testify before you. And I am also here as a deeply concerned educator to implore this council not to cut funding for mental health services in our city's budget.

The mental health crisis among our youth is real, it is growing, and it is much more urgent than has been reported. This crisis mainly stems from the Covid pandemic, which has crushed a generation of kids, and the effects of their addictive cell phone & social media use.

Presently, our schools are at a breaking point because the past several years have left an indelible mark on the mental well-being of all young people. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among teenagers are at all-time highs. I see these effects every day in the classroom and quite frankly, I am overwhelmed. I often struggle to do my job on a daily basis, which is to teach social studies content and skills, because I am primarily playing the role of a therapist for the majority of my teaching periods. As a result, I feel like I am teaching in a triage-like situation and the effects of that are not sustainable for anyone.

Thus, I am asking the City Council to not cut funding for mental health services, but rather increase them.

I am lucky that my school has numerous fantastic counselors and social workers to help me as best as they possibly can navigate to this crisis. Therefore, It is critical that we are able to continue to fund the mental health counselors that my school employed post-Covid. They are critical to countering the effects of Covid isolation and social media, and the impact of these cuts on mental health services can not be understated. The majority of students at my school already face significant challenges outside of the classroom, and school may be the only place that they actually receive any mental health support.



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Our city cannot afford to abandon its children. If we claim to care about education, and the future of New York, then we must act accordingly. Maintaining and expanding mental health services for youth must be a priority in this budget.

In closing, I urge this Council to do the right thing: protect mental health funding. Protect our children. Protect our future. Thank you for your time.



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Testimony of Djeneba Toure, 12th grade student:

Good afternoon, esteemed members of city council, my name is Djeneba Toure, I am a 12th grade student at The Global Learning Collaborative.

As a student growing up in the Bronx, I've had to navigate multiple identities—code-switching from African to Black to a less "ethnic tone," and even adjusting my speech and mannerisms to fit into different spaces. But one thing that remained constant was the lack of representation of my history in my education today. Thus, I am advocating for the inclusion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and a mandatory African American history course in all NYC public schools.

New York City is one of the most diverse places in the world, yet our curriculum tells an incomplete version of American history. African American history is often reduced to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, failing to recognize the full scope of Black contributions, struggles, and achievements. Without this knowledge, students are left unprepared to understand the racial inequalities that still shape our society.

Having to be the one to mention the São João Bautista ship that carried human cargo from Angola to being the only one who understood the history of the nation of Liberia. I remember sitting in history class, learning about the Founding Fathers and the Constitution, yet hearing only brief mentions of slavery, as if Black history began and ended with oppression. No one talked about the countless Black inventors, scholars, and activists beyond Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. That gap in knowledge leaves students like me searching for our own history outside of the classroom.

Critical Race Theory is not about division—it's about education. It equips students with the critical thinking skills to examine history, law, and social structures, helping them understand how race has shaped our institutions.

To make this possible, we need funding for teacher training, updated curriculum materials, and community partnerships. This is not just about funding education—it's about funding truth.

We cannot call ourselves an educated society if we are not willing to teach the full truth. Representation in history is not a privilege—it is a right. If we truly want to prepare students to be leaders, decision-makers, and changemakers, we need to equip them with knowledge that reflects the realities of the world they live in. The fight for racial justice starts in the classroom. Let's make it happen. Thank you.



**THE GLOBAL LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE | NYC**

Testimony of Soleidy Marte, 9th grade student:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Soleidy Marte, and I am a 14 year old freshman at The Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This semester, I have been participating in a Community-Based Civics project through Generation Citizen.

For this project, my class discussed various issues impacting our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After thoughtful discussion and debate, we decided to focus on improving access to mental health providers and set a goal to increase the availability of school-based mental health services so that students can receive the support they may need.

As a teenager, I have experienced how challenging it can be to balance school, family, and personal struggles. When I feel alone in these matters, I feel more distance from my goals, those aspirations that inspire me each day and instill hope for a brighter future. It's isolation and pressure to maintain social relationships, excel academically, and handle responsibilities.

During my 4th grade year, when Covid-19 struck, the impact on my mental health and educational development was profound. The sudden transition from daily in person interactions with classmates and teachers to remote learning felt isolating. The routine of school life disappeared, leading to a repetitive cycle that reduced my motivation. The effects of the period are still present, emphasizing the need for schools to prioritize more accessible mental health resources at school.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense disruption on my education, arguably unlike anything that has ever been seen before in world history. Now, we are facing a growing mental health crisis among young people because issues stemming from the pandemic have yet to be truly dealt with in our schools.

For example, many students do not have someone in their lives whom they can turn to, leaving many to feel hopeless and alone. As a result, they gravitate to isolating themselves on their cell phones. Something that for sure can help with this is more mental health providers in schools.

Therefore, I am asking the NYC City Council to not cut mental health services at school from the budget to ensure that students like me have a safe space to talk, seek help, and learn how to cope with life's challenges.

Thank You.



**THE GLOBAL LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE | NYC**

Testimony of Lauren Manca, 10th grade student:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Lauren Manca and I am a 15 year old sophomore at The Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This semester, I have been participating in a Community-Based Civics project through Generation Citizen.

For this project, my class discussed issues that impact us within our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After much debate, we decided to focus on access to mental health services and set a goal to keep them available in schools.

COVID-19 had a major effect on the school systems, which put extra stress on students. At-home workloads were increased and kids were expected to keep up with these new changes. Challenges like these can take a toll on students' mental health. Having a mental health counselor or a program that students can rely on gives them a space to talk about difficult matters.

Going back to school after COVID-19 was a stressful experience for myself and many other students. After being so used to fully digital school, it was hard to return to an in-person classroom. When my school implemented a mental health program where we received weekly lessons, I felt like I could handle more of my schoolwork. Having a counselor who understood our challenges made me feel better since I knew that I was not the only person struggling.

Evidently, Covid had a large effect on the mental health of many students, and we are still dealing with it today. Having mental health facilities available in schools allows kids to feel like they have a place to go to that is free of judgement, since many of them may not have a family member that they can speak to about their struggles.

All of this is why I am asking the NYC City Council to not cut the funding for mental health programs in schools. It is extremely important and helpful for the growth of students, especially after events that have occurred in the last five years. Thank You.



**THE GLOBAL LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE | NYC**

Testimony of Alix Torres, 11th grade student:

Hello my name is Alix and I appreciate this chance to testify at the hearing today. I'm in eleventh grade at The Global Learning Collaborative and thanks to the Generation Citizen Program I have the opportunity to testify before you today.

An issue that greatly speaks to me is the effects of classes on the learning ability of the students. My class examined issues that affect us in our community and came to a consensus on one item to address together. After much deliberation, we decided to focus on the consequences of budget cuts on merging classes, notably larger class sizes, and established a goal of advocating for more resources to ensure a quality education for all children and sufficient accommodation for all teachers.

Maintaining the school budget is essential to reaching our goal because cramped classrooms hinder learning and make it hard for teachers to give each student individualized attention. Attention directed towards students is extremely beneficial since it makes us feel seen. It helps us students connect with our teachers and feel secure enough to ask the proper questions without feeling embarrassed. Teacher attention has a huge impact on our learning (helping us understand the concept), our motivation, behavior, and our overall well-being. Individualized attention promotes academic performance, increases engagement, encourages positive conduct, and builds our self-esteem.

The fact is, large class sizes are harmful for education. As a student who has attended classes that could easily be broken into two, this has had a significant impact on my ability to concentrate and feel at ease in the classroom. A big student body forced the teachers' attention to shift away from aiding students who needed it and toward the students who are creating distraction. In a smaller class, this problem would have been much easier to resolve.

Finally, I ask you to prioritize funding for our schools so that every student has access to a decent education. Budget cuts have resulted in overcrowded classrooms, fewer resources, and insufficient support, all of which have a negative influence on learning. Students deserve to thrive in an atmosphere with teachers who have availability to support them and the resources they require to achieve. I ask that you protect and enhance school funding in order to lower class sizes, restore critical resources, and invest in our education's future. Our success is dependent on your actions, and we hope you will join with students in making education a priority. Thank you for your time and attention.



**THE GLOBAL LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE | NYC**

Testimony of Lorens Rodriquez, 11th grade student:

Good Afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lorens Rodriguez and I am a junior at The Global Learning Collaborative. As part of the Generation Citizen civics program that we partner with, I am here today to share my concern on the budget cuts to NYC DOE schools special education programs.

As the eldest sibling in my family, with one younger sister and a brother, I have seen how crucial these programs are—not just for education, but for working families as well. My mother, like many parents, depends on schools and after school programs where kids are able to do their homework and participate in fun activities while being provided with a safe, structured and fun environment, as she works as a home attendant and takes care of daily responsibilities.

Cutting funding to such programs would result in countless families like mine struggling with fewer options for childcare, education, and support services. This would be devastating to my family.

Additionally, these cuts will harm students' learning and development as many children rely on early education to build foundational skills. Personally, I experienced most of my elementary school journey in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, but I can say that although I didn't get to experience the early education programs in this city, the after school programs I was able to be apart of did play a role in my academic journey, where I was given support for my homework assignments but was also able to develop new hobbies and a love for the arts, which is why I applied to the school I now attend. Without these programs, kids will be joining school unprepared, making the transition harder and widening the achievement gap.

Programs like these, I believe, have played an immense role in helping me become the honor roll student I am now, to have the courage as a 16 year old to testify in front of the City Council. Moreover, I believe the clubs and afterschool programs that I've attended, such as Model UN, Mock Trial, and Student Gov't have also helped me academically and socially, providing me with an opportunity to come outside of my comfort zone and really put myself out there. While also gaining knowledge and an experience that will help me shape my future.

If the goal is to invest in our city's future, then I believe cutting funding from education is the wrong move. I urge the city to prioritize our schools, support working families and ensure every child has access to the resources they need to succeed. Thank You.

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Submitted by
Nickesha Francis, Policy and Advocacy Manager
Good Shepherd Services

March 13, 2025

Thank you, Chair Rita Joseph and the Members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify on the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

My name is Nickesha Francis, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd Services. I am also on the Steering Committee of the Campaign for Children, the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence, the Learning to Work Coalition, the Student Success Centers Coalition and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEf).

Good Shepherd operates 94 programs that support over 33,000 children and families across the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn. Guided by our values, Good Shepherd Services partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

Good Shepherd has 31 education programs that support over 7,500 students across the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. Our programs include Learning to Work, Student Success Centers, Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC), Transfer Schools and Community Schools.

Essential Education Programs currently funded by one-year city funding

Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, providing long-term funding, the City continued other programs for one year only meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless City leaders act to extend funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

The Mayor's FY 2026 Preliminary Budget extended funding for two of these programs—Learning to Work and summer programming—for another year, but did not include long-term funding for these programs, putting them at risk of cuts in 2026. And, key funding for many other programs was left out of the Preliminary Budget entirely. We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded by one-year city dollars and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July by the Executive Budget — including 3-K, preschool special education classes, community schools (aforementioned), restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family outreach, arts programming and more, as well as to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

The critical education programs that are funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as soon as July 2025 include the following programs, which are currently benefitting tens of thousands of NYC students and their families:

- Early Childhood Education
 - 3-K (\$112M)
 - Preschool Special Education Classes (\$55M)
 - Extended Day Seats (\$25M)
 - Outreach (\$5M)
- Arts Programming (\$41M)
- Community Schools (\$14M)
- Restorative Justice (\$12M)
- Teacher Recruitment (\$10M)
- Mental Health Continuum (\$5M)
- Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach (\$4M)
- High-Impact Tutoring (\$4M)
- Student Success Centers (\$3.3M)

I would like to focus my verbal testimony on highlighting Learning to Work, Community Schools and Student Success Centers.

Learning to Work

In 2004, New York City conducted a study of students who were falling off track and found that we were losing almost 140,000 students every year. In response, NYC created the Learning to Work model to address this giant need which embed Community Based Organizations in Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers. This model allows teachers to focus on instruction, to move students who have high gaps in learning and who come with a variety of learning needs and abilities, and we partner those teachers with counselors, who know how to connect with students and families and move barriers to engagement in school out of the way. We combine all that with an internship program that allows yet another caring adult in the life of students, a worksite mentor who provides real world work experience that teaches students that school has tangible value in the real world and allows students to earn a minimum wage while in school which is sometimes the only income coming into their family. Students rely in the relationships they make in school to advance academically, socially, emotionally and in ways that prepare them for the future.

Good Shepherd founded the South Brooklyn Community High School in 1980 and has since partnered with Transfer schools, community schools and Young Adult Borough Centers across the Bronx and Brooklyn. **While the Mayor's FY 2026 Preliminary Budget extended funding for Learning to Work for another year, the Learning to Work CBOs are operating under contract extensions that do not consider the changing demographic of students we are supporting and the growing cost of operating programs.**

Community Schools

Over the last several years, the city has expanded the community school's initiative, which currently stands at 423 community schools. In this critical period for young people and communities, New York City must continue to make investments in the community schools' strategy.

In 2021, a change in the Office of Community Schools (OCS) funding formula led to significant budget cuts for 52 NYC community schools' contracts that accounts for 70 school's city wide given the campus model community schools. Over the past three years, the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence have advocated annually for funding, resulting in temporary one-year allocations. This funding must now be baselined in the upcoming budget to ensure long-term support.

Dewitt Clinton High School, one of the impacted schools where Good Shepherd Services is the CBO partner, has provided essential services since 2010, including counselling services to students and families that support engagement and success in school. Dewitt Clinton alone **is set to lose over \$400,000 in July if no action is taken**, we would lose out on counseling staff, vocational programs, success mentors, onboarding youth leaders and being able to provide incentives essential in increase attendance. **Restoring this \$9.16M funding is vital to continue these critical services and support the community.**

Budget Recommendations for Community Schools:

- \$9.16M in for the Equitable Funding Formula Restoration funding must be restored and baselined in the Adopted Budget to maintain essential support for 52 contracts which account for 70 Community Schools.
- Fund and baseline \$5 million for Community Schools funded through the NYC Council's initiative to support communities most impacted by COVID-19.
- Ongoing investment is needed to address delays in contract registration and timely payments to nonprofit providers. The procurement process for NYCPS and city agencies must be reformed to eliminate lengthy contract registration, payment delays, and the burdensome bridge loan process—barriers that jeopardize the financial stability of community-based organizations and nonprofit organizations.

Student Success Centers (SSC)

While the adopted budget included one year funding for Student Success Center, 4 SSCs lost funding and had to cease services - I.S. 171 Middle School, Longwood Campus, University Neighborhood Middle School and High School for Hospitality Management - and given the changes in the funding sources (School Allocation Memo and NYCPS Central funding) the full amounts allocated have not reached Community Based Organizations in a timely manner. Programs are concerned that they are not able to sustain services with the current funding sources and distribution plan and have been asking the NYCPS to RFP SSCs to bring about more sustainable and reliable funding.

Good Shepherd Services supports 2 SSCs located at DeWitt Clinton in the Bronx and Randolph in Manhattan where we support over 1,200 students per site. The centers help create a college going culture in schools. This model was born from a need that youth identified and currently NYCPS is using over **\$3.8M** annually to support SSCs. This is the only funding to support SSC. When these funds expire, there will be no other funding to sustain work that has been in existence since 2007.

Youth leaders - students themselves - are trained by the College Access: Research and Action (CARA) Institute which is committed to supporting all students to and through college and support youth applying for college and then sign up for the SATS, research which college have majors that align to their interests, help youth who qualify for application waivers, and support with writing a successful college essay. Some of our Youth leaders are college students who return to help their peers.

We urge Mayor Adams to **baseline these programs in the FY 26 Executive Budget so that students, families, educators, and providers will have assurance that they can continue relying on these programs in future years and to make additional investments that are needed to support students, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.**

Many of these programs were essential before the pandemic and are even more critical today. Baseline funding for these programs is crucial to supporting the most vulnerable and already under-resourced children, families, communities, and the workforce that support them. We can all agree that children deserve more, NOT less and

yet, we continue to see these programs funded on an annual basis and the need to advocacy to have them restored and baselined.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education,

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair

March 14, 2025

Thank you to the City Council and Chairwoman Joseph for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the Committee's consideration today. Graham values the opportunity to write in support of our Community Schools, to assure the Council of their value in the education of New York City's youth, and to urge the Council against potential funding cuts to the essential program.

Graham was founded in 1806. Graham's mission is to provide life-changing tools and resources for children, young adults, and families who face some of the most difficult obstacles caused by poverty, racial injustice, and lack of access to educational opportunities, living wage employment, quality healthcare, and affordable housing, as well as to collaborate with communities and strong partners to create and implement innovative strategies so everyone can lead healthy, joyful, and successful lives. Today, Graham reaches over 8,000 children, parents, and community members each year across 19 sites in the city's most under-resourced communities in Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. We reach strong, resilient children and families in these neighborhoods who persevere in the face of systemic poverty and structural racism. Our supports include community centers, afterschool, youth development, college and career access and support, youth education and career coaching, internships, entrepreneurial training and coaching, mental and behavioral health services, parenting supports, foster care, and adoption. Most of the families Graham works with are people of color: 75% are Black/African American, and in terms of ethnicity, 45% identify as Latinx. Graham employs approximately 420 full-time and 55 part-time staff, manages more than 300 volunteers and interns, and trains 350 foster parents each year. We operate two separate Community Schools, one in Harlem and one in the Bronx.

Community Schools are partnerships between community-based organizations such as Graham and public schools to help support families to help students succeed. Graham runs two Community Schools, one at P.S./M.S. 123 Mahalia Jackson in Harlem and one at M.S. 424 Bronx Academy for Multi-Media in Hunts Point. These Community Schools integrate academics, health and wellness, youth development, and family engagement into schools. By addressing barriers to learning and healthy development which stem from poverty, these school partnerships aim to improve attendance and outcomes when schools are struggling in these metrics.



Graham's Community School Directors and staff work hard to identify community needs and assets, develop interventions and strategies to combat chronic absenteeism, promote student and family wellness, and reconnect the community to the school.

Both of Graham's Community Schools have seen significant improvement since we began our work with their communities. At P.S. 123 in Harlem, around half of students go on to attend high schools with graduation rates over 85%; in 2021, only 17% of students went on to such a school. At M.S. 424, it's the majority of students. Attendance has also improved. The NYC Public Schools Community Schools initiative selected schools in need of attendance improvements. Over the past three years since we began our Community School partnership, M.S. 424's attendance rates have increased by 4 percentage points, from 87% to 91%. This school was removed from the District's 'chronically absent' list; there has also been a 15% reduction in chronic absenteeism.

At MS424 BAMB, our Community School Director has engaged families and community members to the extent that when she walks down the street in the morning, a parent might stick their head out the window to shout out to her that their child is sick and won't be in school that day. A shopkeeper urges children to get to school when he sees her walking his way.

Community Schools hire teams of Success Mentors who go to families' homes and help them to problem solve and get the support they need around the barriers that are getting in the way of attendance. Depending on the school, Community Schools also provide mental health and support for teachers around challenging student behaviors.

It's that type of relationship building and positive accountability that Community Schools Success Mentors develop with families and community members that make a difference in school attendance and performance. Community School funding is at risk of being cut in the upcoming budget. The dollars at stake are critical to the sustainment of the hundreds of Community Schools supporting children and families across New York City. On behalf of Graham, as well as the students and families we serve across the city, I urge you to protect Community Schools from potential funding cuts.

Thank you again for considering our testimony.

Kym Watson

TESTIMONY

The New York City Council

Committee on Education

Re: Preliminary Budget

Grand St. Settlement
80 Pitt Street
New York, New York

March 13, 2025



Testimony of Grand St. Settlement
To the New York City Council Committee on Education
Regarding The Preliminary Budget

March 13, 2025

Aaron M. Sanders, Deputy Director of Government & Community Relations

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening this important preliminary hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Grand St. Settlement (Grand Street) is a 109-year-old multi-service Settlement House. We serve over 18,000 New Yorkers through vital early childhood, youth, and older adult programs infused with impactful benefits assistance on the Lower East Side, Manhattan, and the Bronx.

We are also a member of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), a policy and social change organization, representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. As a member organization, we work collaboratively to support early childhood education. Additionally, we are a member of the Day Care Council of New York, a membership organization dedicated to the expansion of quality child care and family services.

Today, we are asking the New York City Council and the Adams administration to strengthen and preserve early education programs for families by reversing \$300 million in proposed cuts. Expenditure reductions to the City's early education programs would negatively impact children and families. We are advocating for the following:

- Restore \$197 million to the DOE for 3-K programs (\$112m), preschool special education (\$55m), extended day options (\$25m), and family outreach support (\$5m) to ensure continuity of services for families across New York City.
- To continue on the path toward universal child care in New York City, 2 Care should be funded to create child care for 2-year-olds. The investment, which will start at \$25.7 million, will serve 1,000 children.
- Baseline \$31 million for Learning to Work programs

- Restore \$14 million for Community Schools

City funding supports our network of center-based early childhood education programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Grand Street early childhood education programs serve working families and their children, many of whom live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles to education, health, and economic prosperity. Our network of child care and educational programs provides families with the opportunity that supports their child's short-term and long-term development.

Additionally, as a nonprofit entity, we partner with several community schools to support the physical, emotional, and social development of youth who need services. Our engagement is correlated with positive outcomes for youth and the reduction of neighborhood violence and crime.

Despite recent progress, child care affordability remains an issue for many working families. We are concerned about the administration's decision to omit 3-K, preschool special education classes, and Promise NYC from the preliminary budget. Research indicates that early education is a key social determinant of health that impacts children's futures. Early child education takes a holistic approach to development—cognitively, academically, and socio-emotionally, these programs prepare children for the next stage of life. To make significant progress towards the creation of high-quality, equitable affordable child care. We urge the Adams administration to commit to reversing cuts and making additional investments in the sector. All families should have access to high-quality, child care options. Baseline funding for the City's education programs would help disrupt systemic inequities that impact low-income working families.

Budget reductions for the city's early childhood education programs would be catastrophic for working families. According to a recent [report](#) from the New York City Comptroller's Office, the childcare sectors face ongoing challenges post-pandemic, including a dearth of child care slots, retention in its workforce, and soaring child care costs. As cited in the report, from 2018 to 2023, New York's average annual child care prices were higher than every other state except for Massachusetts, rising nearly 18% from \$12,422 per child to \$14,621, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. These disruptions not only impact working families, but they also impact the business sector and commercial corridors: a lack of universal child care is projected to reduce revenue \$384 million in revenue according to the aforementioned report. Investments in the sector will also promote economic growth, as parents in the labor force would be able to balance family and work.

We are also concerned about proposed cuts to youth education programs. A restoration of funding for community schools are important resource for the youth we serve. By restoring \$14 million in the budget, we can continue to provide youth with key services that are correlated with

youth development and long-term success. Cuts to youth programs will have a chilling effect on families and the next generation of leaders. Baselineing \$31 million for the Learning to Work program will provide workforce development opportunities for adolescents and young adults. This program is essential to the professional development and maturation of your youth.

In closing, we urge the City Council and the Administration to reverse the proposed cuts and commit to a robust increase in funding for education programs.

Testimony re: Budget Hearing - Education**Submitted to: New York City Council Committee on Education****Submitted by: Francesca Perrone, Director of Policy & Social Impact at****Hispanic Federation****March 15, 2025**

Thank you, Chairwoman Joseph and all other committee members, for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Francesca Perrone, and I am the Director of Policy and Social Impact for Hispanic Federation (HF); a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through programs and legislative advocacy. HF's testimony is also informed by the Latino Education Advocacy Directors (LEAD) Coalition, which consists of leading educational advocacy organizations committed to improving Latinx academic outcomes and opportunities in New York State. Powered by the Hispanic Federation, the coalition works to highlight and address the educational needs of Latinx students in the following ways: identifying and supporting effective practice; public policy advocacy and research; and the advancement of a shared educational agenda.

Today, we strongly advocate for full funding of mental health resources for students and programmatic support for immigrant families in the New York City budget. Investing in these programs is not just a commitment to our students—it is an investment in the future and well-being of our city. Ensuring adequate resources will strengthen educational outcomes, promote equity, and foster a healthier, more resilient New York.

Mental Health/Socio-Emotional Supports: Mental Health Continuum

According to the “State of Mental Health” Report published by NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, mental health is one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time. The city’s youngest reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness. The report indicated there has been an increase from 27% to 38% of public high school students who reported feeling sad or hopeless. Students who identified as another or multiple races were more likely to report persistent sadness or hopelessness than their white counterparts.¹ Given these data, it is urgent for the City Council to continue investing in the Mental Health Continuum.

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/mh/state-of-mental-health-new-yorkers.pdf>

Access to mental health services and social-emotional support is essential for student success, improving graduation rates and expanding postsecondary and career opportunities. However, the Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget fails to include funding for the Mental Health Continuum—a critical program that must be sustained.

We urge the City Council to prioritize \$5 million in FY26 funding for the Continuum. This partnership between NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) and the NYC Department of Education has provided students with vital therapy and clinical services, ensuring those facing significant mental health challenges receive the timely support they need. These services also help schools foster a positive climate through restorative practices.

We appreciate the Council's past commitment to this initiative and strongly advocate for its continued investment in the final FY26 budget to protect students' well-being and future success.

Continuing Support for Migrant Students and Families

Family engagement is critical to the success of immigrant students in New York City public schools, ensuring they feel supported both at home and in the classroom. Providing culturally responsive resources, language access, and meaningful participation opportunities empowers families as active partners in their children's education. Strengthening these connections drives academic success, social integration, and a more inclusive school community.

In FY 2025, immigrant family engagement programs were funded at \$4 million, yet the FY 2026 Preliminary Budget eliminates this critical investment. We urge the City Council to restore and sustain funding for these initiatives, which are essential for fostering strong family-school partnerships, improving student outcomes, and ensuring equitable access to education. Immigrant families face distinct barriers, from language access to navigating complex systems. Without continued funding, we risk reversing progress and undermining efforts to create inclusive, supportive learning environments for all students.

Supporting the Latine Curriculum

The Latine Studies Initiative aims to address inequalities in access to quality education by providing curricular resources to help teachers recognize who their students are and the strengths of the communities they belong to. This initiative seeks to enhance school experiences for children and youth of all backgrounds by providing an interdisciplinary

curricular framework that empowers learners of all ages to study, understand, and appreciate the history, culture, and intellectual contributions of Latinas and Latinos. The initiative will include a PK-12 curriculum in studies of Latinidad that provides teachers with curricular resources across grade levels, aligned with five content area standards in English language arts, mathematics, STEM, social studies, and multilingual learners. It will also include a plan for professional learning to support the implementation and assessment of the new curriculum, aligned with systems for information access and dissemination.

Thank you for supporting year one of the curriculum in FY25. We look forward to the continued support in FY26 for year two of the program. This support will ensure testing and refinement of the curriculum to maximize its effectiveness.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. It is essential that New York City remains committed to funding programs that uplift and support our most vulnerable communities, ensuring their well-being and long-term success.



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**New York City Council Oversight Hearing, Education Committee
on FY26 Preliminary Budget**

March 13, 2025

We would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Education for holding this important oversight hearing on the City's FY2026 Preliminary Budget. My name is Lori Podvesker, and I am the Director of Policy at INCLUDEnyc. For over 40 years, INCLUDEnyc (formerly known as Resources for Children with Special Needs) has helped hundreds of thousands of NYC families navigate the complex special education service and support systems.

We commend the mayor and the City Council for making critical investments last year in vital programs, staff, and services that were at risk due to temporary federal dollars and city funds. While the City base-lined many of these programs, such as Summer Rising and Learning to Work, it only funded other programs for one year, leaving many of them at risk of being cut unless extended in the FY2026 budget.

This includes \$55 million for additional preschool special education classes not included in the FY2026 preliminary budget, despite their growing need. According to the Council's Report on the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Plan for the Committee on Education, six hundred preschoolers with disabilities are waiting for placements, and five thousand eight hundred eighty-seven preschoolers are not receiving all their mandated special education services or receive no services at all.

We are very concerned with how the city will address any potential cuts in the \$2 billion federal funding it receives if it is unable to collect, including the near \$300 million in funding the city gets for related services such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy, and psychological services such as counseling, as mandated per the federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We are equally concerned about a potential shortfall in the \$686 million targeted for Title 1 funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working together and partnering with you to improve equity and access for all young people with disabilities in New York City.

Sincerely,

Lori Podvesker

Director of Disability and Education Policy



March 13, 2025

The New York City Council
Committee on Education
City Hall Park
New York, NY 10007

Re: FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony, Support for City's First Readers

On behalf of Jumpstart for Young Children, we are writing to share our fiscal year 2026 (FY26) budget priority to address the early literacy needs of the youngest learners in New York City.

At Jumpstart, we aim to ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. To achieve that mission, we strive to tackle the civil rights issue of our time—literacy. In the current academic year, we are doing this by collaborating with four higher education partners (Brooklyn College, Lehman College, New York University, and Pace University) and 195 AmeriCorps service members to deliver high-quality, evidence-based early literacy programming in 43 preschool classrooms across New York City.

Jumpstart for Young Children is one of 17 partner organizations that comprise City's First Readers (CFR). Together, we deliver early childhood education programming across every Council district, ensuring families can access critical early learning opportunities. Our work is not just about books—it's about building strong foundations for children's academic success, social-emotional learning, and long-term economic stability in our growing knowledge economy.

Jumpstart applauds the New York City Council for your continuous investments in early literacy through the CFR initiative. Since 2014, CFR has brought together various nonprofit organizations to provide free, community-driven, culturally relevant programs and resources to build a strong foundation in early literacy across all NYC neighborhoods.

To give every child in New York City a fair start, we must fully fund and expand early childhood education and literacy. Research confirms that 90% of a child's brain development happens by age five, making this the most significant time horizon to realize the long-term return on investment for early childhood literacy. In addition to the long-term return on investment, we already see these vital investments' short-term impact.

At Jumpstart for Young Children, we monitor language and literacy gains using the Test of Preschool Early Literacy (TOPEL). Last year, nearly two-thirds of Jumpstart children made gains on the TOPEL, and 96% of Corps Members observed growth in their partner children. We also use innovative data collection methods, like Language ENvironment Analysis (LENA) "talk pedometers," to measure conversational turns between children and adults, enhancing our understanding of early language development.



To sustain the evidence-based work of Jumpstart for Young Children, this year, City's First Readers is requesting a \$1 million enhancement—a modest but critical increase that will be shared with Jumpstart and the other 16 partner organizations. A significant portion of this funding will go toward maintaining and expanding our capacity to serve communities and families in an uncertain external environment, as we have seen the cost of books and printed materials has skyrocketed due to inflation, tariffs, and supply chain disruptions, all while we confront the realities of frozen and decreased federal funding. We need this local investment to ensure that books and educational resources remain accessible to all children and families in New York City.

New York City is a world-renowned leader in education. That is why we respectfully urge the Council to continue to invest in early childhood literacy by fully funding City's First Readers in FY26 and approving this critically needed enhancement to provide stability and sustainability to the program in the face of federal uncertainty.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Crystal Rountree".

Crystal Rountree
Chief Executive Officer
Jumpstart for Young Children
368 9th Avenue
New York, NY 10001
www.jstart.org



**New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair**

**FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13, 2025**

Testimony of Teresa Baik, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). KCS is a 52-year old social service nonprofit organization whose mission is to be a bridge for Korean immigrants and the wider Asian community to fully integrate into society and overcome any economic, health and linguistic barriers so that they become independent and thriving members of the community. We accomplish this mission by providing culturally competent programs in the areas of Aging, Education, Immigration, Workforce Development, Public Health and Mental Health. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the Coalition for Asian American Children & Families (CACF).

The mayor has repeatedly defunded our public schools and this has made it almost impossible for our students and families to have the support they need. Threats to cut art programming by \$41M will completely gut the already shrinking art programming available at New York City (NYC) public schools. We need to at minimum restore \$400 million dollars of funding for NYC public school programs to ensure the most vulnerable students are supported.

HEADQUARTERS (ADULT DAYCARE)	OLDER ADULT CENTER	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (2)	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC
EDUCATION HR IMMIGRATION PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	42-15 166th St, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-886-8203	315 5th Ave, #705, New York, NY 10016 Tel: 212-463-9685	410 Broad Ave, #201, Palisades Park, NJ 07650 Tel: 201-429-2866	325 West 38th St, #1107, New York, NY 10018 Tel: 929-300-8630, 929-341-8302	42-16 162nd St, 2FL, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-366-9540
203-05 32nd Ave, Bayside, NY 11361 Tel: 718-939-6137	37-06 111th St, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 718-651-9220	2460 Lemoine Ave, #400P, Fort Lee, NJ 07024 Tel: 201-364-8375	3556 159th St, #2nd Floor, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-939-6137		
	633 W 115th St, New York, NY 10025 Tel: 718-886-8203, 347-923-0124	103-04 39th Ave, #103, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 917-396-4149			

This includes students with disabilities, English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, 3K/PreK students, and students experiencing mental health issues, among others. Our community relies on these funding sources.

While existing programming is not enough to support the needs of our students, we need these cuts restored to *maintain* the existing educational programming. [18.7 percent](#) of the student population in NYC identifies as Asian and many students and families in the AAPI community depend on these programs. Specifically, we need:

- **Mental Health Continuum (\$5M):** Offer a range of mental health services within schools to support students' emotional well-being and address mental health challenges.
- **Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach (\$4M):** Ensure immigrant families are informed and engaged in their children's education.
- **Arts Programming (\$41M):** Fund arts education programs to foster creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among students.
- **Teacher Recruitment (\$10M):** Initiatives that attract and retain qualified teachers, ensuring high-quality instruction across all schools.
- **Preschool Special Education (\$55M):** Fund special education preschool classes to meet growing demand and provide necessary support for children with disabilities.

HEADQUARTERS (ADULT DAYCARE)	OLDER ADULT CENTER	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (2)	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC
EDUCATION HR IMMIGRATION PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	42-15 166th St, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-886-8203	315 5th Ave, #705, New York, NY 10016 Tel: 212-463-9685	410 Broad Ave, #201, Palisades Park, NJ 07650 Tel: 201-429-2866	325 West 38th St, #1107, New York, NY 10018 Tel: 929-300-8630, 929-341-8302	42-16 162nd St, 2FL, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-366-9540
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	633 W 115th St, New York, NY 10025 Tel: 718-886-8203, 347-923-0124	103-04 39th Ave, #103, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 917-396-4149			



KCS
WWW.KCSNY.ORG

THE KOREAN COMMUNITY
SERVICES OF METROPOLITAN
NEW YORK, INC.

뉴욕한인봉사센터

- **Extended Day/Year 3-K & Pre-K (\$25M):** Increase seats for extended day and year-round early childhood programs for more accessible, full-day options.
- **Early Childhood Outreach (\$5M):** Strengthen outreach efforts to connect families with available early childhood education programs and resources.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and there are many other important programs that will be cut and ultimately affect the community if these cuts are not restored. We ask the Council to ensure the continuation of these vital programs.

Thank you for your attention.

HEADQUARTERS
(ADULT DAYCARE)

EDUCATION | HR IMMIGRATION |
PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH
CENTER | WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT

203-05 32nd Ave,
Bayside, NY 11361
Tel: 718-939-6137

**OLDER ADULT
CENTER**

42-15 166th St,
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: 718-886-8203

37-06 111th St,
Corona, NY 11368
Tel: 718-651-9220

633 W 115th St,
New York, NY 10025
Tel: 718-886-8203,
347-923-0124

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
RESEARCH CENTER (1)**

315 5th Ave, #705,
New York, NY 10016
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2460 Lemoine Ave, #400P,
Fort Lee, NJ 07024
Tel: 201-364-8375

103-04 39th Ave, #103,
Corona, NY 11368
Tel: 917-396-4149

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
RESEARCH CENTER (2)**

410 Broad Ave, #201,
Palisades Park, NJ 07650
Tel: 201-429-2866

3556 159th St, #2nd Floor,
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: 718-939-6137

**WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**

325 West 38th St, #1107,
New York, NY 10018
Tel: 929-300-8630,
929-341-8302

**MENTAL HEALTH
CLINIC**

42-16 162nd St, 2FL,
Flushing, NY 11358
Tel: 718-366-9540



New York City Council Budget Hearing Committee on Education

Testimony of: The Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
3101 Kingsbridge Terrace, Bronx, NY 10463

Submitted by: Marisol Rios | Chief Officer of Early Childhood

Hearing Date: 3/13/25

Dear Mayor Adams:

We are writing on behalf of the participants and families of the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, who are in great need of the valuable services provided by KHCC, particularly the Early Childhood program. Our early childhood programs—including Early Head Start, Early Learn, Head Start, Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), and Family Childcare Network—provide children, birth-5, with nurturing, educational environments where they can learn, grow, and thrive. We help parents of the children we serve develop skills to become effective caregivers and create nurturing home environments.

Early childhood education is one of the most critical investments we can make for the future of our children and society. Canceling funding for these programs would have far-reaching negative consequences, not just for the children directly affected, but for our communities as a whole. Research consistently shows that the first few years of a child's life are foundational for cognitive, social, and emotional development. When we provide children with quality early learning experiences, we are giving them the tools they need to succeed in school and beyond, laying the groundwork for a lifetime of learning and achievement.

Furthermore, early childhood education programs help close the achievement gap, ensuring that children from all backgrounds—especially those from low-income families—have access to the opportunities they deserve. Without funding, these children will miss out on essential support, which could lead to a cycle of disadvantage and inequality.

Early childhood educators also play a vital role in fostering critical life skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and emotional regulation. Eliminating funding would not only limit children's potential but also harm the workforce by undercutting the jobs of these dedicated professionals who shape the next generation.

Investing in early childhood education is an investment in the future. It strengthens our communities, reduces long-term social costs, and provides children with a solid foundation for



lifelong success. We must prioritize and protect this vital resource, ensuring every child has access to the best possible start in life.

We urge you to increase funding for Early Childhood programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 city budget to ensure our children have access to these programs.

Sincerely,

Heydee Vargas
KHCC Parent Council Chairperson
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

Marlene Hungria
KHCC Board Member



Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

3101 Kingsbridge Terrace, Bronx, New York - 10463
Tel: 718.884.0700 | Fax: 718.884.0858 | www.khcc-nyc.org | [@khccnyc](https://twitter.com/khccnyc)

March 13, 2025

Greetings Esteemed NYC Council Colleagues,

I am writing to ask for your support of the ***Student Success Center network***. The Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC) has led the North West Bronx in postsecondary planning with our signature College Directions Program since the 1990's. Currently, KHCC spearheads 2 Student Success Centers or SSC's on the Walton and JFK Campuses in the Bronx school district 10. Each year, we engage hundreds of high school students in the difficult process of developing a post-secondary plan. We believe that having our staff, youth leaders and bridge coaches on each campus has shifted the culture of these student communities. Young people are learning about their options and taught to envision their life after high school early, as 9th and 10th graders. By the time they reach their junior year, they are eager to explore career pathways, learn about trade programs, consider gap year programs, or explore college. Dozens of our program alumni have gotten their first jobs with our center and given back to their community and their school by working with younger peers and modeling what success looks like.


Restore \$3.3 Million to Student Success Centers

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

Student Success Centers (SSCs) aim to fill this college counseling gap by pairing the expertise of community-based organizations with youth leadership training. In an SSC, youth leaders are trained as Peer Leaders. Together with CBO staff, Peer Leaders provide workshops, college trips, and one-on-one individualized counseling to help students through the college admissions and financial aid processes. The Student Success Center model is available at 34 high schools citywide. Settlement Houses operate 27 of these programs. It is vital that the City commit to supporting all students navigating postsecondary options and the college admissions systems by restoring this program. UNH urges the City to **restore \$3.3 million for the Student Success Center program through sustainable funding sources, and baseline this funding for the outyears.**

Additionally, we urge the City to streamline the FY26 funding process to help providers understand earlier how much funding they should expect per site, and how to access this funding. In FY25, SSC providers were made to believe that school partners would allocate all College & Career Advising SAM funding to the SSC. However, school partners were not made aware of this assumption, leading some principals to refuse to allocate the full amount of funding, and reducing the total amount of operating funds available to the SSCs. Increased transparency and accountability for the roles of all stakeholders will improve the planning and implementation of SSCs.

Sadie Mahoney

Sadie Mahoney, LCSW
CPO of Youth and Family Services
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center




**LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY**

PROGRAM IN NUTRITION

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Testimony Submitted By

Alison Garbarini, MS, RDN, CDN

Research Associate

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

**For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education
March 13th, 2025**

Chair Joseph, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, thank you for your time and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Alison Garbarini and I am a research associate at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy. Colloquially known as the Tisch Food Center, our organization works to create a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. We are a leader in food and nutrition education and in school food research and evaluation.

At the Tisch Food Center, we build community and capacity through our Food Ed Coalition, which brings together a diverse group of advocates, community members, and other stakeholders. Together, our mission is to ensure that all NYC students have access to 1) quality food and nutrition education and 2) sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

1. We urge the council to strengthen Food Ed in NYC - by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing Food Ed programs and partner support.

Renewing \$250,000 of funding for the Food Ed Hub is *essential* for expanding access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households. This funding facilitates the collective action of a diverse group of advocates, program leaders, school community members, food education providers, and other stakeholders, as we collaborate to advance health equity, nutrition security, and sustainable food systems. To further advance the coalition's growth, we request an additional \$100,000 to develop a strategic framework with an outside consultant.

Likewise, increasing funding for food education programs is vital: only about 190 of the 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support. Expanding funding to \$3 million would provide additional resources that will allow more students access to food education programming.

With \$2.5 million, the City Council can establish a Speaker's Initiative. This will facilitate targeted funding for 100 Community Based Organizations (CBOs), enabling them to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula - *ultimately expanding their operational capacity and ensuring access to high-quality nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable students.*

Finally, investing \$100,000 in a consistent evaluation methodology for CBOs would inform the community and council of the value and areas for improvement in food ed programming.

2.We also urge the council to improve NYC nutrition security - by strengthening the understanding of key food initiatives and ensuring the development of inclusive and transparent standards for Food Ed.

We request funding of \$499,878 to support the collaboration between the CUNY School of Public Health and the Tisch Food Center in assessing key food initiatives like Plant-Powered Fridays. This will allow us to work with CBOs to foster greater food and nutrition security across NYC. It will also enhance CUNY's Food Justice Leadership Fellowship by training diverse undergraduate students to advocate for community-based food policies.

In addition, we request \$1.5 million to develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS. We believe CBOs should be compensated for their expertise in co-creating standards and professional development resources for teachers and schools, and recommend \$300,000 in funding to support this.

To strengthen food initiatives and investments, we request that the Comptroller's Office conduct a comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce - to evaluate career pathways, wages, and professional development opportunities.

3.We implore the council to expand and support summer nutrition opportunities and food access.

Food access and education are essential for students - even when school is out. Expanding initiatives like Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support will help bridge this gap and ensure continued support for students during the summer months. To maximize the effectiveness of these programs, it is crucial to incorporate a meal period before dismissal - particularly for students who rely on summer meals as their primary source of nutrition. Finally, increasing funding for free Health Bucks would further expand access to fresh food by simplifying the application process and allowing CBOs to partner with schools more effectively.

—

Food and nutrition education is not a luxury—it's a necessity. I urge the City Council to prioritize funding for these initiatives. We're committed to ensuring that every NYC student has the knowledge and resources to make healthy, informed food choices in school and beyond. *With your continued support, we can make an even bigger impact.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alison Garbarini, MS, RDN, CDN
Research Associate

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy

[Redacted Signature]

FOOD ED HUB

NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE



Overview:

Access to healthy, nourishing foods is critical to leveling health inequities as hunger and diet-related diseases continue to disproportionately challenge low-income families and communities of color in NYC. To address this challenge, the Food Ed Coalition has identified actions the City Council must take to ensure stronger, safer, and healthier communities. The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members convened by the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.



The City Council must support these initiatives in budgeting:

Strengthen NYC Food Ed

- Fund the Food Ed Hub & Coalition
- Enhance Food Ed Programs & Partners Support

Improve NYC Nutrition Security

- Understand Food Initiatives, Promote Youth Leadership, Review Food Worker Titles & Capacity
- Develop Inclusive & Transparent Food Ed Standards

Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition

- Support Summer Rising & Summer Meal with Food Ed Programming
- Increase Health Bucks Funding

Sustain the Food Ed Hub and Coalition

- Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (\$250,000).
- Develop a strategic framework with the assistance of an outside consultant to support the coalition's long-term growth. This framework will align with the goals of Food Ed Community Based Organizations (CBOs) while advancing NYC's broader objectives of supporting low-income New Yorkers facing food and housing insecurity. The plan will reduce reliance on NYC City Council funding and focus on improving nutrition security, especially for students in NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) (\$100,000).

Enhance Support for Food Ed Programs & Partners

- Increase funding for Food Ed programming in NYCPS. Food Ed is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

Currently, only 190 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will expand programming to 100 more schools, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators (\$3 million).

- Establish a Speaker's Initiative to strengthen Food Ed organizations serving NYCPS through targeted funding and capacity-building support. This initiative will provide 100 established CBOs with \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. Unlike other project-based funding, these grants would reduce administrative burdens on smaller organizations while supporting the hiring of qualified staff, purchase essential equipment, and develop new curricula. Investing in a diverse range of organizations will enhance culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities, ensuring more students have access to these critical programs (\$2.5 million).
- Invest in program evaluation to provide CBOs with a tool to measure the effectiveness and impact of Food Ed programming in NYCPS and their communities. A standardized evaluation method will help assess program value, identify areas for improvement, and ensure continued growth and effectiveness (\$100,000).





FOOD ED HUB

NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Strengthen Understanding of Food Initiatives & Investments

- Amplify community voices in assessing and improving NYCPS food initiatives (e.g. Plant-powered Fridays) to strengthen food and nutrition security. The Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute will partner with CBOs and families to evaluate NYCPS food programs, ensuring diverse voices shape impact assessments and address gaps in how these initiatives serve residents. CUNY will expand its Food Justice Fellowship, which trains undergraduates to advocate for community-based food initiatives and pairs them with internships at food justice organizations. We will prioritize students nominated by City Council Members and internship sites in their districts. (\$499,878).
- Request the Comptroller's Office to conduct a comprehensive review of NYC food service roles and titles, assessing career pathways, wages, staffing capacity, and professional development opportunities for managers and kitchen staff.

Ensure Transparency & Inclusivity in Food Ed Standards

- Develop culturally responsive, research-based Food Ed standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million).
- Compensate CBOs for their expertise in co-creating food education standards and developing professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).
- Include CBOs in training development to ensure culturally relevant, community driven approaches to Food Ed.

Strengthen Food Access Programs in Schools & Communities

- Expand support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Programs by integrating Food Ed programming. These programs provide students with nutritious meals and hands-on food education when school is out. To maximize impact, require that a meal period is included before dismissal or that students eat first, followed by a structured learning activity. These changes will help ensure that students—especially those from food-insecure families where summer meals may be their only nutritious meal—have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.
- Increase funding for free Health Bucks to expand access to fresh, healthy food for families. This additional funding would supplement—not replace—existing programs run by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). In 2024, the DOHMH received 600 applications for Health Bucks but could not fully fund all requests, leaving many local CBOs underfunded or without funding altogether. Increased funding will:
 - Enable Food Ed CBOs to partner with schools in every council district.
 - Simplify the application process for CBOs.
 - Improve access to affordable, nutritious food for families with children.

A hungry child can't think.

A well-nourished child thinks, learns, and thrives!

"[Food and nutrition education is] important because students will pay the cost for an unhealthy diet and lifestyle in the future."

-NYC Public Schools educator, PD Session 01/29/2024



LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION
TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Jen Cadenhead, Executive Director, (212) 678-3716, jwc2151@tc.columbia.edu
Gitit Bachiry, Research Associate II, (212) 678-7513, gb2864@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, Research Associate I, (212) 678-3000 (ext: 3158), ag4415@tc.columbia.edu



LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY

PROGRAM IN NUTRITION

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Testimony submitted by:

Gitit Bachiry, MS, RDN

Research and Project Manager

Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Teachers College, Columbia University

For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education

March 13th, 2025

Chair Joseph, members of the City Council, and your staff, thank you for your service and dedication to the children and families of New York City.

My name is Gitit Bachiry, and I am a Research and Project Manager at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am grateful for our city's continued investment in food education and nutrition programs in schools, which are essential to the health, well-being, and success of our students.

As an advocate for food education, I am proud to endorse several key policy initiatives compiled by our Food Ed Hub and Coalition, representative of about 300 organizations operating food and nutrition education in New York City Public Schools.

First, I urge the council to renew funding for the Food Ed Hub and Coalition. This Hub serves as a critical resource for collaboration among food education providers and expands access to vital nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, particularly students from low-income and housing-insecure households. Renewing \$250,000 of funding for the Food Ed Hub will ensure these vital programs continue to reach those who need them the most.

In addition to renewing Food Ed Hub funding, **we call for the development of a strategic framework to help advance this coalition's growth.** With the support of an outside consultant, this framework would align with the goals of the Tisch Food Center and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to improve nutrition security and food education in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS). A \$100,000 investment in this effort would help the center's growth and reduce reliance on city council funding.

Next, I urge the Council to increase funding for food education programs in New York City's public schools. Food education is essential for students' long-term health and academic success, however, only 190 out of nearly 1,800 schools received support from the food education grant this year. Expanding funding to \$3 million would allow for the delivery of quality food education programming to more students, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have access to this crucial component of their education.

To further support the expansion of food education to more students, we urge the council to establish a Speaker's Initiative, which would provide targeted funding to 100

CBOs to help them hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula. Many of these CBOs are small and mighty, but require more administrative support in order to serve additional schools. We request \$2.5 million to support this initiative, ensuring more organizations can effectively run their programming in schools.

Investing in consistent evaluation methodology for CBOs is also essential for ensuring the efficacy of food education. A \$100,000 investment would help develop evaluations that would inform both the community and the council about the effectiveness of food education programming and identify areas for improvement.

To guide these initiatives, we ask that you **support the development of inclusive, transparent food education standards for all NYC public schools**. These standards will help guide educators and community partners in delivering effective and culturally responsive food education. We request \$1.5 million for this development of standards and an additional \$300,000 to compensate CBOs for their expertise in co-creating standards and professional development resources for teachers and schools.

We also urge the council to improve NYC nutrition security by strengthening the understanding of key food initiatives, such as Plant-Powered Fridays, in fostering greater food and nutrition security. This collaboration between the Tisch Food Center and CUNY School of Public Health brings together two academic institutions, as well as CBOs to address how food initiatives serve residents. This program also aligns with CUNY's Food Justice Leadership Fellowship, which trains diverse undergraduate students to advocate for community-based food policies. We recommend \$499,878 in funding to support this initiative.

To further improve nutrition security, a comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce is necessary to evaluate career pathways, wages, and professional development opportunities. We request that the Comptroller's Office conduct this important study to ensure that those working to provide our children with healthy meals are properly supported.

I also want to emphasize the importance of food access outside of the school year. Expanding programs like Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support will help provide nutritious meals and hands-on food education during the summer months, when students may otherwise go without. Additionally, increasing funding for Health Bucks will ensure families can access fresh, healthy food throughout the year, and particularly in the summer months.

To close, I urge the City Council to prioritize funding for these initiatives. Investing in food education and nutrition security not only strengthens our students' educational outcomes but also helps build a healthier and more equitable city for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your attention and dedication to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

Gitit Bachiry, MS, RDN

FOOD ED HUB

NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Overview:

Access to healthy, nourishing foods is critical to leveling health inequities as hunger and diet-related diseases continue to disproportionately challenge low-income families and communities of color in NYC. To address this challenge, the Food Ed Coalition has identified actions the City Council must take to ensure stronger, safer, and healthier communities. The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members convened by the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The City Council must support these initiatives in budgeting:

Strengthen NYC Food Ed

- Fund the Food Ed Hub & Coalition
- Enhance Food Ed Programs & Partners Support

Improve NYC Nutrition Security

- Understand Food Initiatives, Promote Youth Leadership, Review Food Worker Titles & Capacity
- Develop Inclusive & Transparent Food Ed Standards

Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition

- Support Summer Rising & Summer Meal with Food Ed Programming
- Increase Health Bucks Funding

Sustain the Food Ed Hub and Coalition

- Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (\$250,000).
- Develop a strategic framework with the assistance of an outside consultant to support the coalition's long-term growth. This framework will align with the goals of Food Ed Community Based Organizations (CBOs) while advancing NYC's broader objectives of supporting low-income New Yorkers facing food and housing insecurity. The plan will reduce reliance on NYC City Council funding and focus on improving nutrition security, especially for students in NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) (\$100,000).

Enhance Support for Food Ed Programs & Partners

- Increase funding for Food Ed programming in NYCPS. Food Ed is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

Currently, only 190 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will expand programming to 100 more schools, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators (\$3 million).

- Establish a Speaker's Initiative to strengthen Food Ed organizations serving NYCPS through targeted funding and capacity-building support. This initiative will provide 100 established CBOs with \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. Unlike other project-based funding, these grants would reduce administrative burdens on smaller organizations while supporting the hiring of qualified staff, purchase essential equipment, and develop new curricula. Investing in a diverse range of organizations will enhance culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities, ensuring more students have access to these critical programs (\$2.5 million).
- Invest in program evaluation to provide CBOs with a tool to measure the effectiveness and impact of Food Ed programming in NYCPS and their communities. A standardized evaluation method will help assess program value, identify areas for improvement, and ensure continued growth and effectiveness (\$100,000).



FOOD ED HUB

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Strengthen Understanding of Food Initiatives & Investments

- Amplify community voices in assessing and improving NYCPS food initiatives (e.g. Plant-powered Fridays) to strengthen food and nutrition security. The Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute will partner with CBOs and families to evaluate NYCPS food programs, ensuring diverse voices shape impact assessments and address gaps in how these initiatives serve residents. CUNY will expand its Food Justice Fellowship, which trains undergraduates to advocate for community-based food initiatives and pairs them with internships at food justice organizations. We will prioritize students nominated by City Council Members and internship sites in their districts. (\$499,878).
- Request the Comptroller's Office to conduct a comprehensive review of NYC food service roles and titles, assessing career pathways, wages, staffing capacity, and professional development opportunities for managers and kitchen staff.

Ensure Transparency & Inclusivity in Food Ed Standards

- Develop culturally responsive, research-based Food Ed standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million).
- Compensate CBOs for their expertise in co-creating food education standards and developing professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).
- Include CBOs in training development to ensure culturally relevant, community driven approaches to Food Ed.

Strengthen Food Access Programs in Schools & Communities

- Expand support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Programs by integrating Food Ed programming. These programs provide students with nutritious meals and hands-on food education when school is out. To maximize impact, require that a meal period is included before dismissal or that students eat first, followed by a structured learning activity. These changes will help ensure that students—especially those from food-insecure families where summer meals may be their only nutritious meal—have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.
- Increase funding for free Health Bucks to expand access to fresh, healthy food for families. This additional funding would supplement—not replace—existing programs run by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). In 2024, the DOHMH received 600 applications for Health Bucks but could not fully fund all requests, leaving many local CBOs underfunded or without funding altogether. Increased funding will:
 - Enable Food Ed CBOs to partner with schools in every council district.
 - Simplify the application process for CBOs.
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"[Food and nutrition education is] important because students will pay the cost for an unhealthy diet and lifestyle in the future."

-NYC Public Schools educator, PD Session 01/29/2024



LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION
TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Questions or comments? Contact:
Dr. Jen Cadenhead, Executive Director, (212) 678-3716, jwc2151@tc.columbia.edu
Gitit Bachiry, Research Associate II, (212) 678-7513, gb2864@tc.columbia.edu
Alison Garbarini, Research Associate I, (212) 678-3000 (ext: 3158), ag4415@tc.columbia.edu



Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

Program in Nutrition

Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony submitted by:

Jennifer Cadenhead, PhD, RDN

Research Assistant Professor & Executive Director
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Teachers College, Columbia University
jwc2151@tc.columbia.edu, 212.678.3716

March 16, 2024

Dear Chair Joseph, esteemed members of the Education Committee, and Council Members more broadly,

Thank you for your continuous efforts to improve the lives and educational outcomes of students. I appreciate your considered efforts.

My name is Dr. Jennifer W. Cadenhead, and I am the Executive Director of the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University. Our work is dedicated to ensuring that all NYC students receive high-quality food and nutrition education and have access to healthy, culturally responsive school meals. We conduct research, provide educator support, and advocate for policies that promote food security and health equity in New York City (NYC).

At the Tisch Food Center, we convene the Food Ed Coalition, a diverse group of more than 300 food and nutrition education advocates, community-based organizations (CBOs), and school leaders working collectively to expand access to food education and support food security for all NYC students

Food and nutrition education is critical to the wellbeing of the youth of a community. You have taken significant recent strides to improve access. Still, our NYC community still very much needs your consideration. As our nation struggles with rising rates of pre-diabetes and other diet-related chronic disease, NYC continues to have even higher incidences and prevalence of these conditions. Yet, the ability to understand how to make healthier lifestyle choices and the privilege to advocate for greater access to healthier options is limited for individuals who live under challenging circumstances. These needs are amplified in NYC. Educators continue to say that students need both a better understanding of the role of their food and drink choices, and

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Program in Nutrition • Teachers College • Columbia University

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access to healthier options. Being able to make that happen takes work. That is the role of the work that we do.

I'm advocating for funding under three broad areas:

1. Continuing to strengthen the efforts to improve food and nutrition knowledge among NYC students and educators;
2. Strengthening transparency and inclusivity of food initiatives with more involvement and advocacy training of key community stakeholders;
3. Providing additional opportunities to expand food access in vulnerable communities.

Specifically, I would like to draw attention to three items under the broad areas noted above:

1. Renewing Funding for the Food Ed Hub (\$250,000)

The Food Ed Hub has been instrumental in fostering collaboration among food education providers, ensuring that schools, educators, and students receive high-quality programming and resources. At a time when food and nutrition security efforts are under attack and unhealthy food marketing is more pervasive than ever, continued funding for the Hub is critical. This funding supports professional development for educators, strategic alignment of food education with academic standards, and direct assistance to schools and community partners. Without this investment, we risk losing momentum in our fight for a healthier, more equitable food environment in NYC.

2. Supporting Community Advocacy & Leadership (\$499,878)

Too often, community voices are left unheard in shaping food and nutrition policies that directly impact them. We have proposed a joint initiative: "Strengthening Food Access with the CUNY Food Justice Leadership Fellowship." The funding that the Tisch Food Center manages (\$249,878) will be used to amplify the voices of the community to identify the most effective aspects of food initiatives being undertaken in the city. This will enable NYC residents to speak out on what matters most to them by allowing us to report to City Council what residents think of programming like "Plant Powered Fridays" in a systematic way to support advocacy. In partnership with CUNY's School of Public Health, this initiative (\$250,000) will empower diverse undergraduate students to develop leadership skills to advocate for equitable food policies and community-driven solutions. This funding will expand leadership development, research, and community engagement efforts, ensuring that those most affected by food insecurity have a seat at the table in decision-making processes. City Council members will have the option to nominate youth to the program.

3. Providing a Tool for CBOs to Evaluate Program Effectiveness (\$100,000)

While many organizations work tirelessly to provide food education and services, few

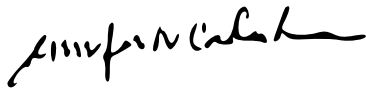
have access to standardized tools to measure their impact effectively. Investing in a consistent evaluation framework will allow CBOs to assess and improve their programs, demonstrating the tangible benefits of food education in NYC schools. At a minimum, we must ensure that community partners have the ability to understand and showcase their contributions to student health and well-being.

Additionally, we stand in full support of the broader Food Ed Coalition funding priorities, which are attached with the one-pager, including expanding food education programming in NYC public schools and increasing access to culturally relevant nutrition education. Providing additional funding for Health Bucks and more Summer Rising opportunities will greatly assist with food and nutrition security in vulnerable communities. Children need adequate healthy nutrition to fully develop their capabilities – including physical, mental and emotional. Investing in these programs is an investment in the health, academic success, and future of our children.

Food and nutrition education is not a luxury—it is a necessity. With the City Council's continued support, we can ensure that every NYC student receives the knowledge and resources needed to make healthy, informed food choices – and be empowered to self-advocate. I urge you to prioritize funding for these initiatives in the FY26 budget.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the well-being of NYC's students. I welcome any questions and look forward to continuing this important work together.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer W. Cadenhead, PhD, RDN
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Research Assistant Professor, Program in Nutrition
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FOOD ED HUB

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Overview:

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LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY

PROGRAM IN NUTRITION

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Testimony submitted by:

Tyra Vanriel, MS-RDN candidate

Graduate Student Intern

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For the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon, Council Member Joseph and esteemed members of the City Council Committee on Education. Thank you for your dedicated service.

My name is Tyra Vanriel and I am a Graduate Intern at Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy. I am honored to have the opportunity to speak with you today. I am a second year student in the Master of Science in Nutrition Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am on track to become a registered dietitian upon completing my studies this year.

The Food Ed Coalition, convened by the Tisch Food Center, is vital in promoting equity, inclusivity, and access to food and nutrition education throughout NYC. My studies have illuminated the disparities in our community and my fieldwork experience has reinforced the importance of advocating for equity. I stand for cultural advocacy, inclusion of healthy and culturally diverse meals in schools, and a continuous nutrition education system that empowers students to understand the benefits of nutritious foods for their bodies and minds.

We urge the council to strengthen Food Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing Food Ed programs & partner supports. The Food Ed Hub works diligently to ensure that all NYC students have quality food and nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food. Increasing funding for food education programs is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes.

In October and November 2024, I had the opportunity to co-teach two nutrition lessons about fiber to third grade students. During the two lessons, the students were very engaged and excited to try the samples of different fruits, vegetables, and whole grains we offered. This experience reinforced the need to educate students about nutrition from an early age and continuously reiterate the knowledge they learned.

During my Zankel fellowship with the REACH program, I taught two fourth grade classes at PS 36 throughout the 2023 to 2024 academic school year, where I taught introductory nutrition. After providing both pre and post surveys to students, I was able to see that their knowledge about nutrition and our food system has improved. Additionally, those ~ 32 students expressed more interest in incorporating healthier foods because they understood the benefits.

This leads into my support for the next policing initiative. A \$100,000 investment in developing a consistent evaluation methodology for community-based organizations (CBOs) is crucial; this will provide invaluable data to inform both the community and the council about the effectiveness of current food education programming, highlighting successes and identifying areas ripe for improvement, ensuring that our investments yield the most significant possible impact.

Lastly, it is essential to highlight how the work of our partner organizations positively influences our NYC children. Last Spring I had the opportunity to visit two elementary schools, PS 75 and PS 163, to interact with students during their lunch period and motivate them to sample new recipes from the salad bar. Wellness in the Schools, one of our partner organizations, works with both schools and has made great efforts to develop creative ways to promote health and wellness. During one visit, a third-grade teacher dedicated a period to teach her students about nutrition education utilizing the GreenBeetz curriculum, another partner organization. The lessons included students learning about modern and traditional food systems and food's implications on their health. It is crucial for students to be curious about where their food comes from and its impacts from elementary school. At the end of that lesson, the students tried a cultural snack –yucca– which they thoroughly enjoyed.

By prioritizing food education, we empower students with the knowledge and skills to make informed dietary choices, leading to improved academic performance, behavior, and overall well-being.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Legal Services NYC
Written Testimony Submission for Executive Budget Hearing
Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon. My name is Michaela Shuchman, and I am a Skadden Legal Fellow at Legal Services NYC (“LSNYC”) (<https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/about-us>). Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of funding civil legal services, like Legal Services NYC, to represent and assist students with disabilities and their parents. We’re particularly excited to share with you our ongoing work to support students in Manifestation Determination Reviews, a process that is supposed to uncover whether a student's disciplinary suspension resulted from the student's disability and thus should be treated rather than punished.

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, the LGBTIQ+ community, and other vulnerable constituents. 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 practice at LSNYC assists hundreds of New York City schoolchildren and their families each year to ensure access to quality education through our holistic model of representation. We represent students who are most at-risk and in need of advocacy including students living in poverty, students with disabilities, students facing exclusionary discipline, English Language Learners, and other vulnerable student populations and their families. Our attorneys and social workers assist families with a host of education issues including language access, special education services and placement, compensatory educational services, disciplinary proceedings, transportation, and reasonable accommodations.

In addition to representing individual students and their families, we also seek to address systemic issues impacting the clients we serve. Through litigation, advocacy, education, and collaboration we seek to eliminate the school to prison pipeline, promote social, emotional, and mental health support in schools, and foster the development of healing centered schools, among other things. Community education and outreach is an important part of our work and is now more important than ever, as we focus on enhancing youth mental health and advocating for healing-centered schools.

Our work advocating directly for individual students and their families directly informs our systemic advocacy efforts. As an example, I have represented many students with disabilities in disciplinary hearings. When a student with a disability is suspended for greater than ten days, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act requires school districts to conduct a Manifestation Determination Review, or MDR, before removing them from their classrooms. This critical meeting should determine whether the behavior that led to the suspension stemmed from the student's disability and whether the student was receiving mandated special education services. If either answer is yes, the student must return to class immediately, and the school

must then determine the root causes of the behavior and the steps necessary to help the student avoid engaging in the behavior again.

However, in most of my clients' MDRs, schools were more focused on punishment than support. And the data backs up my experience: New York City public schools issued over 14,000 disciplinary removals of students with disabilities last school year – nearly 40% of total suspensions, despite these students comprising only 22% of the student population. And each suspension represents more than lost classroom time; it often means the denial of crucial special education services and the first step towards school disengagement. Independent MDR monitor reports from 2015-2018 found that only 45-55% of the time was there “effective discussion” of the student’s disability. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, data showed that positive findings that the behavior was related to a disability were found more frequently for white students than for their Black and Latinx peers.

Through conversations with our clients, analysis of the data, and discussions as an advocacy community, we have seen the difference it makes when families have access to advocates who can help them navigate the complex special education and discipline systems and protect their child’s right to a meaningful education. A disciplinary removal represents a critical turning point in a student's education, especially for those with disabilities. With proper advocacy, this moment can become an opportunity to reinvest in our most at-risk students rather than a step toward disengagement and dropout. We have spent the greater part of the last year advocating for automaticity in the connection of students with disabilities and their families with advocates at this critical juncture in their educational journey.

Our education practice – made up of a small but mighty group of attorneys and advocates – handled nearly 600 education cases for New York City residents across the five boroughs over the last year, for students aging from under five to over 20. I alone handled close to sixty exclusionary discipline cases last year, and this school year I am already at 55. And yet, the need for LSNYC’s education advocacy services far outstrips our resources.

The potential of legal representation to achieve improved educational outcomes and overcome disparities both in discipline and special education is clear.¹ With the support of the City Council, we can continue this work and expand the number of children and parents who can receive legal advice and advocacy. With additional resources, our impact would be magnified and deepened, as we serve families using our holistic model, linking them to community-based services, advocating for them with the Department of Education, filing impartial hearings, complaints in state and federal court, and taking steps to have greater impact on the system overall. We respectfully request the provision of \$500,000 to support our Access to Education Project.

¹ See, e.g., The Intersection of Race, Wealth, and Special Education: The Role of Structural Inequities in the IDEA (https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2153&context=nyls_law_review); How Increased Legal Representation Can Close the Gap in Special Education Discrepancies (<https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3294&context=lawreview>)



New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

The stakes for early childhood education in New York City have never been higher. At a time when research confirms that 90% of a child's brain development happens by age five, we cannot afford to underfund the programs that shape their futures. The Council has fought hard in past budget cycles to protect early childhood education from devastating cuts, yet here we are again—fighting just to maintain the status quo when the need has never been greater. This year, we must go beyond defense. We must ensure that every child—particularly those affected by poverty and systemic inequities and injustice—has access to the critical early learning experiences that prevent educational inequities, counteract the effects of trauma, and set them on a path toward lifelong success. Anything less is a failure to invest in the very foundation of our city's future.

The demand for early childhood programs has only grown, fueled by rising economic hardship, homelessness, a mental health crisis, and an influx of migrant families seeking stability and opportunity. Yet, instead of expanding access to meet this need, we are once again being asked to defend the bare minimum. The Council must not allow itself to be drawn into a debate about merely restoring funding to last year's levels. That approach is a failure. The status quo is not enough. If we want to give every child in New York City a fair start, we must fully fund and expand early childhood education now.

I am Albania Jimenez, representing Literacy in Community or LINC, one of 17 partner organizations that make up **City's First Readers (CFR)**—the Council's only early literacy initiative. Together, we deliver early childhood education programming across every Council district, ensuring that families have access to critical early learning opportunities. Our work is not just about books—it's about building strong foundations for children's academic success, emotional well-being, and long-term stability.

The families we serve include thousands of newly arrived children—many of whom have faced extraordinary hardship. Science has confirmed what early literacy advocates have long known: early learning experiences, particularly those rooted in language and literacy, are powerful tools for countering the effects of trauma. Research on brain development shows that **by age 3, a child's brain is already 80% formed; by age 5, it's 90% developed.** These early years are the most critical window for learning, and they determine how well a child will be prepared for school and beyond. The reality is simple: if we fail to invest in early childhood education now, we set children up for failure later. We set ourselves up for later remediations.

As the Mayor has often said, it is far more effective—and cost-effective—to support children upstream. Early intervention reduces the need for costly remedial services later on. The children we serve, particularly migrant children, have often experienced severe trauma in their origin country, on their journey to the USA, or after their arrival—exposure to violence, food insecurity, family separation, and instability. These experiences can have long-lasting consequences on their ability to learn and thrive. But research also





City's First Readers

An initiative of the New York City Council

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www.citysfirstreaders.com

shows that consistent reading routines with a caring adult can provide stability, build trust, and help children develop the critical pre-literacy skills that will shape their future success. This is the work City's First Readers partners do every day.

There is no question that New York City's safety net is being strained by the surge of migrant families. But that is not an excuse to neglect our responsibility to all children. City's First Readers organizations remain unwavering in our commitment to serve every child, including new arrivals. We are on the frontlines, ensuring that all families—regardless of their immigration status—have access to the educational support they need.

LINC's programs make reading visible and valued across our neighborhoods of focus. Our programs empower parents with the confidence and knowledge they need to help their children be school ready, eager to learn and excited about reading. We connect families to local resources and importantly, to each other. We characterize LINC as working at the intersection of education and community development. LINC also serves as the facilitating partner for the City's First Readers initiative. Unlike many Council initiatives which are conduits for needed funding, our leadership has made this initiative a true collaboration between a strong network of early literacy organizations. I am happy to provide the independent analysis of the initiative's FY24 impact.

This year, **City's First Readers is requesting a \$1 million enhancement**—a modest but critical increase that will be shared across our 17 partner organizations. A significant portion of this funding will go toward expanding our capacity to serve newly arrived families by providing translated and culturally aligned materials. Whether it's a bilingual board book that becomes a toddler's source of comfort or a packet of resources that helps a parent navigate life in a new city, these materials are essential to creating stability and connection. Yet, the cost of books and printed materials has skyrocketed due to inflation, tariffs, and supply chain disruptions. We need this investment to ensure that books and educational resources remain accessible—not a luxury.

New York City cannot claim to be a leader in education while failing to meet the basic learning needs of our youngest children. We urge the Council to fully fund City's First Readers and approve this enhancement. The need has never been greater, and the time to act is now.

Submitted by

Albania Jimenez

Senior Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives

ajimenez@lincnyc.org - [REDACTED]

For additional information contact Emmanuel Novy - enovy@lincnyc.org





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www.sciu32bj.org

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March 13, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Joe Aulisio, and I am the Deputy Director of the Schools Division at SEIU Local 32BJ. As most of you are aware, 32BJ is the nation's largest property services union, representing cleaners, property maintenance workers, doorpersons, security officers, building engineers, and school, airport and food service workers across the East Coast, with approximately 94,000 members in New York.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of the approximately 5,100 cleaners and handypersons employed by New York City Schools Support Services (NYCSSS) and represented by SEIU 32BJ - to once again call on the City Council to fully fund our city Schools, including funding for schools cleaning and maintenance.

As this committee knows, these hardworking men and women, employed by New York City School Support Services (NYCSSS), work under a contract with the Department of Education to provide school facility cleaning and maintenance services. Today, it bears repeating, since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these essential workers have been on the front lines putting themselves at risk in order to keep students and staff healthy.

Five years ago this month, schools were closed to students and teachers, and they became resource and childcare centers for children of first responders, food distribution hubs, COVID testing sites, and more. The schools facilities staff made sure the schools could remain healthy and safe places for the community at large.

Every spring 32BJ comes before the City Council as we determine our budget for next year, and our message is always grounded by the same foundational principle—that we must ensure that the cleanliness and safety of NYC's public school buildings is a top priority. Maintaining our public school buildings is necessary to facilitate student learning, as it creates a dignified and positive educational setting. And yet, too often NYC's school facilities budget is left structurally underfunded, often leaving students' learning environments in a state of disrepair. Simply put, NYCSSS should be fully funded and not stuck in a perpetual state of facing cuts in hours and positions.



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Funding for NYCSSS represents a small portion of DOE's annual spending – under the Mayor's proposal, the NYCSSS funding represents about 2% of the DOE budget. Even then, the mayor's proposal for Fiscal Year 2026 falls short of fully funding NYCSSS.

However, it has an outsized impact on the welfare of our school community. This includes not only students and teachers, but also NYCSSS workers themselves. Many live in the very communities they serve and send their own children to our public schools. When properly funded, NYCSSS provides good, family sustaining jobs to community members. Cuts of hours and positions would have a significantly adverse impact on the City's most underserved communities.

We cannot afford to reduce maintenance or cleaning in New York City schools. We cannot allow our children's learning environment to suffer. An investment in NYCSSS is an investment in the trained cleaning and maintenance workforce we need to ensure the safety of more than a million public school students, teachers, and staff, particularly in black and brown communities that have historically been underserved.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF LOCAL 372 | NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES
DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 | AFSCME
TO THE PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING ON EDUCATION
MARCH 13, 2024
2:30 PM

Good Afternoon Chair Joseph, and to your distinguished colleagues of the City Council, I am Glenys Rivera, 2nd Vice President of Local 372 - NYC Board of Education Employees, District Council 37 | AFSCME. I am here today under the leadership of President Sean D. Francois I, to provide testimony related to the Mayor's proposed education budget on behalf of our membership, comprising of approximately 24,000 workers.

Our membership, which includes 8,000 School Lunch Workers, performs essential support services to almost a million public school children of New York City to be learning-ready. School Lunch Workers unload, prepare, and serve food each school day, including during Summer Recess. Not only is school lunch critical to a student's health and well-being, it also ensures that students have the nutrition they need throughout the day to learn. We know that the nutrition provided by our schools is essential to our students residing in underserved communities and troubled homes, and can make the difference between a child having access to at least one meal daily.

Last year, the City restored \$25 million towards the school food programs and the restoration of some popular school food items back on the menu. With the City restoring funding towards the school lunch program, it is important that there is sufficient kitchen staff to service the restored menu. Local 372 respectfully requests that the City allocate **\$10 million towards hiring an additional 1,000 School Lunch Workers**, bringing the total number in service up to 9,000. This will help reduce the strains on the current workforce while continuing to fulfill the breakfast

and lunch initiatives set by the previous and current administrations, including implementing more cooking from scratch, and continuing to feed the children of New York City. In addition, this would allow the City to work in replacing our transitioning workforce, as members prepare for retirement.

School Lunch Workers must also be able to accommodate dietary restrictions, including medical or religious restrictions. With there being several enhanced school food programs to accommodate such restrictions, School Lunch Workers must follow multiple sets of strict guidelines to ensure that our school children are eating safely, while contemporaneously preparing and serving meals during the “Breakfast in the Classroom” and lunch programs. Local 372 is extremely supportive of these programs, as well as universal lunch – because every child deserves to come to class with a full stomach. However, for the school food programs to be successful and efficient, we need an additional 1,000 School Lunch Workers to alleviate the burdens experienced by the workforce. With the current inadequate staffing levels, it makes it extremely difficult for School Lunch Workers to meet these requirements within work hours. These workers have to come to work earlier and stay later without extra compensation to ensure that meals are ready to feed nearly a million children across 1,600 schools when that bell rings.

Another struggle faced by our school lunch employees, which also has a direct impact on sanitation and hygiene in the school cafeterias and kitchens, is the inadequate air conditioning or ventilation. Updating the non-existent and inadequate cooling and air exchange systems in public schools' kitchens has been a persistent struggle faced by School Lunch Workers for decades. The vast majority of schools built from the 1930s through the 1990s lack the proper design and operation for acceptable indoor air circulation. Due to the age and condition of these buildings, many lack the necessary electrical capabilities to simply install cool units in kitchen spaces. Local

372 workers are in these kitchens every day, suffering through temperatures that can reach over 130 degrees! Proper air conditioning and ventilation would filter out heat, fumes, and airborne pestilence.

A 2017 report titled “Too Hot to Learn,” detailed the significant lack of air conditioning. Former Mayor Bill de Blasio and other City officials rallied their support to install air conditioning in teaching spaces. That same energy and leadership is needed to support the health and safety of thousands of School Lunch Workers. We thank Council Member Yeger, and would be remiss to not acknowledge his former colleagues Council Members Treyger and Kallos, for bringing these conditions to light in their introduction of Resolution 1145-2019, calling on the Department of Education (“DOE”) to install air conditioning or cooling systems in New York City public school kitchens. Local 372 requests that the DOE and the School Construction Authority (“SCA”) comprehensively evaluate the school system’s outstanding kitchen ventilation needs, throughout the five boroughs, and we request that more funding be allocated towards a remediation plan pursuant to that evaluation.

In closing, Local 372 extends its gratitude to the City Council for its support to our members. We implore you for your allocation of \$10 million dedicated to School Lunch staffing and additional resources, in order to remediate our membership’s current working conditions. On behalf of Local 372, NYC Board of Education, District Council 37 | AFSCME, I thank you for this opportunity to testify.



New York City Education Committee

March 13, 2025, 10am

TESTIMONY

Juliana Cope, Assistant Executive Director for Development and External Affairs, Jcope@mind-builders.org, [REDACTED]

Thank you all – you, dedicated public officials for your service and for this opportunity to share the work of Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center and other community-based organizations who train the next generation of New York City civic leaders and cultural contributors and on behalf of the youth, families, and neighborhoods we are honored to serve.

Founded in 1978, Mind-Builders began with a grassroots mission to inspire the growth of local youth and families in the Northeast Bronx by providing low-cost, high-quality arts education. Since then, we have grown to become a cultural anchor for our community – more than just an arts center, we bring together best practices in arts education, youth development and community engagement in the belief that a healthy community is a vital ingredient in the healthy development of a child.

For 47 years, Mind-Builders has offered hundreds of music, dance, theater, folk culture, production corps and martial arts programs serving over 750 young people every week. In 2015, we were honored to be selected to participate in the first NYC cohort of Universal Pre-K providers and have continued the program since thanks to ongoing support from the City of New York. During the school year, 18 three- to four-year-olds and their families participated in our full-day Universal Pre-K Program. This free, arts-centered program, including Suzuki violin, follows the curriculum established by the NYC Department of Education, with whom we are so very fortunate to partner. We have close partnerships with the local public schools, which send their children to us for arts instruction, and for the past 10 years our successful Pre-Kindergarten program has served as a feeder into the local school kindergartens, where we help families and students enroll. Many of our Pre-K families stay with us year after year, to participate in our after school and Saturday arts and culture programs in music, dance, theater, folk culture and martial arts.

Intrinsic to our purpose is the community we serve, which is predominantly lower-income; our children and families identify as West African, Black, Latino, and/or Caribbean. Participants come from every zip code in the Bronx, but predominantly from neighborhoods local to our facility – Olinville, Wakefield, Williamsbridge, and Norwood, which have historically had fewer safety nets than their peers, despite greater need. Mind-Builders employs dedicated staff coming from the five boroughs: professional teaching artists, pre-kindergarten instructors, support and admin staff, reflective of the communities we serve. Our work is woven into the fabric of our neighborhood and our staff continue to make transformation in the lives of our young people possible.

Organizations like Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center touch every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. We call on the City to continue your ongoing investments in the cultural sector, supporting work that effectively transforms lives, neighborhoods and cities. We look forward to the opportunity to continue to provide UPK services to the community.



New York City Council
Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

Testimony submitted by
Larry Lieberman, Executive Director, Mouse

Subject: Essential Career Readiness Education in AI Engineering and Technology for NYCPS Students

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of Mouse, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Education. I would especially like to thank Chairperson Joseph for her leadership on education and career readiness to ensure that NYC's students are prepared to enter higher ed and the workforce that awaits them upon graduation.

Thank you Council Members Chris Banks, Gale A. Brewer, Selvena N. Brooks-Powers, Oswald Farias, Kamillah Hanks, Robert F. Holden, Crystal Hudson, Rita C. Joseph, Linda Lee, Julie Menin, Sandy Nurse, Yusef Salaam, and Lynda C. Schulman for their support of Mouse's work in NYC Public Schools and the Committee's critical work providing guidance and oversight of NYC Public Schools. I would also like to thank the New York City Council for your support of Mouse over the years as we continue our work together to provide much-needed leadership on effectively preparing all NYC Public Schools students for careers using technology.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity to present today.

Mouse is a nonprofit education organization based in New York City. Since our founding in 1997 and thanks to the longstanding and generous support by the New York City Council and its Members, Mouse's computer science educators have provided career connected technology education to over 100,000 NYCPS students and teachers. Mouse delivers comprehensive computer science education to students attending schools historically under-resourced in technology ed. This year, 93% of students in Mouse courses identify as students of color.

Since 2020, more than 14,000 students and their teachers at 250 NYC Public middle and high schools have completed career connected technology courses provided by Mouse.

Mouse is an essential and highly efficient resource used by NYCPS to deliver technology education to communities that they have found difficult to reach on their own. Mouse's AI Engineering Fundamentals and Design League courses allow students to develop the hard and soft skills needed to understand AI, how it works, its biases, and AI's impact on our students' higher education tracks and career pathways.

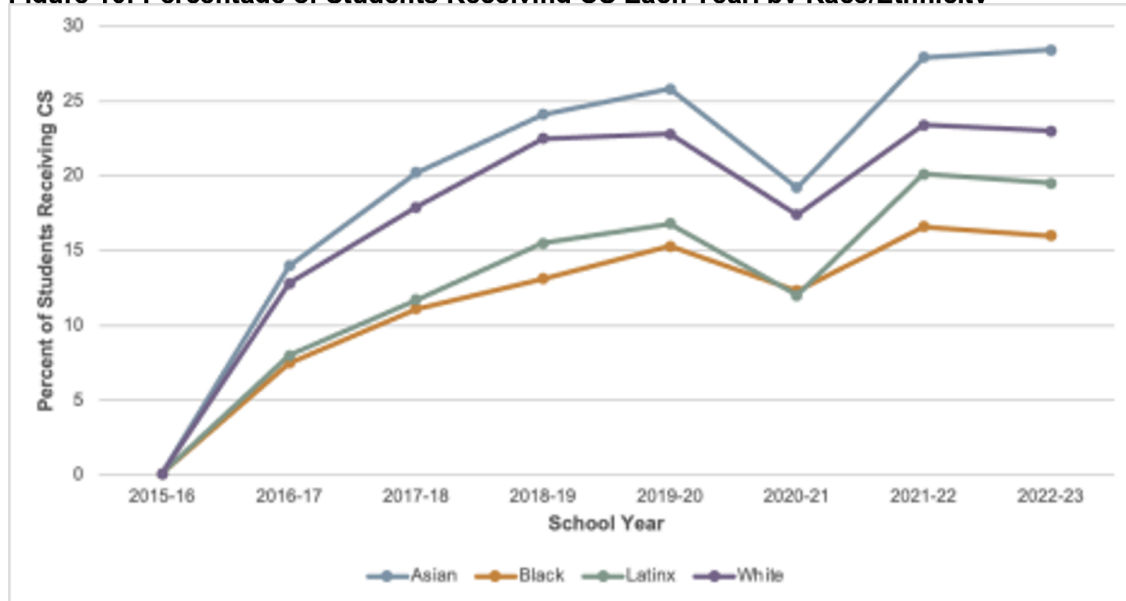
Mouse programs empower students to use computational tools and thinking to solve problems, create solutions, and express themselves in a way that reflects their interests and experiences, fostering autonomy and ownership of their learning and advancing students on their career pathways.

During these deeply uncertain times, Mouse's work in our City is more critical than ever.

Our NYC Public Schools students are not receiving equal access to the education and skills they need to develop computational agency and be prepared for successful careers using technology.

Earlier this year, when the NYU Research Alliance released its report on computer science education in NYCPS, we all learned about the deep inequity of implementation of NYCPS's CS4ALL program. While enormous improvements have been made in the reach of computer science education in our City, according to the NYU Research Alliance report, Black and Latinx students at NYCPS are 30-40% less likely to receive computer science education than their White and Asian counterparts.

Figure 10: Percentage of Students Receiving CS Each Year, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Research Alliance calculations on data provided by NYCPS.

Notes: This analysis is based on data from students in community school districts 1-32. Students from special and alternative districts 75, 79, 84, and 88 are not included in these results. Additionally, data from Indigenous students and students with multiple ethnicities are not displayed due to the small numbers of their enrollment in NYC public schools.

Source: Expanding Computer Science Education for All: Successes, Challenges, and Implications of NYC's CS4All Initiative, Synthesis Report, December 2024.

Mouse continues to be especially effective in delivering expansive computer science education and technology mentorships to Black and Latinx students. We invite the City Council Members to join Mouse, our incredible NYCPS students, their teachers, and principals on Thursday, May 29, 2025, at Amazon's headquarters in Manhattan for Mouse's Citywide celebration and student tech competition.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

**Testimony of Erika Marte,
Senior Director of College and Career Pathways, New Settlement
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Education
Council Member Rita C. Joseph, Chair**

Submitted March 13, 2025

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education, for holding this critical Preliminary Budget hearing. My name is Dr. Erika Marte, and I serve as Senior Director of College and Career Pathways at New Settlement — a community-based organization in the Southwest Bronx. I'm privileged to lead our Student Success Center at Taft Educational Campus, our College Access Center, and our Community Schools at Claremont International High School.

Today, I write to advocate fiercely for our students, families, teachers, and staff — the very people shaping our future. I implore the New York State budget to prioritize their needs by restoring vital funding to these essential education programs:

- \$3.3 million for Student Success Centers (SSC)
- \$14 million for Community Schools
- A baseline of \$31 million for Learning to Work programs

This isn't just about numbers; it's about the lives behind them. I know this intimately. I arrived in the Bronx from the Dominican Republic at eight years old, carrying far more emotional baggage than physical possessions. Educational programs, like the ones I now lead, were my lifeline. They recognized my potential, addressed my emotional, financial, and academic needs, and gave me a chance.

Beyond my personal story, the data is undeniable: our youth face staggering disparities in their pursuit of post-secondary education. More importantly, I witness the impact daily. I see our SSC youth leaders, with genuine warmth and laughter, guiding their peers through the daunting college application process, creating a connection that makes a real, tangible difference. I see teachers and students coming to our community office seeking support for mental health and basic necessities for families in transitional housing, and I see the relief, the focus, and the academic improvement that follows when those burdens are eased. I see the confidence blooming in students who participate in internships and youth-led programs, knowing they can contribute to their families' financial stability.

These programs aren't just statistics; they are the bedrock of opportunity. I am not a lone voice, or the only person to witness these positive outcomes. I am one of many. I urge you to invest in our students, invest in our future, and restore this essential funding.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at e.marte@newsettlement.org.

The New York City Charter School Center
Erik Joerss, Vice President of Advocacy and Government Affairs
Testimony Presented to the Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Education
Committee
New York City Council City Council: Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13, 2025

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

For over twenty years, public charter schools have been an integral part of the public education system in New York City (NYC). In the 2024-25 school year there are 280 public charter schools operating in the five boroughs serving over 149,000 students. This represents 15% of public school students, of which nearly 90% are Black/African American or Latinx. New York's public charter schools are serving primarily low-income NYC families (82% are economically disadvantaged), offering additional high-quality educational options for families.¹

Learn to Work is a Department of Education (DOE) funded program that provides grants to community-based organizations which allows them to partner with public transfer high schools serving overage/under-credited students. Currently, all DOE transfer high schools have or are eligible to have a CBO partnership under this program. This partnership provides students with critical benefits such as intervention and support, internships, workforce and college preparation, social and emotional counseling, alongside experiential learning and enhancement activities.

The 2,400 charter transfer high school students (distributed among 9 NYC charter schools) have been denied access to these impactful Learn to Work programs. There is no rationale for this exclusion. Charter school transfer high school students, like their counterparts in the district, need career readiness skills and mentorship opportunities, in addition to potential job opportunities. The Learn to Work program has been shown to significantly benefit students by bridging the gap between education and employment. It provides students with the skills, experience and connections needed to succeed in their chosen career path and should be expanded to include charter school students. Given the relatively small number of charter transfer high schools, the expansion of the Learn to Work program to charter schools is expected to cost under \$3 million.

Charter school students remain the lowest funded public-school students in NYC. It is nothing more than a myth that charter schools drain resources or cost the district a disproportionate amount of public aid. A NYC student attending a charter school receives much less public funding than their New York counterparts in district public schools. The most recent Independent Budget Office of New York City (IBO) analysis found that NYC charter schools were

¹ Enrollment figures and demographics based on NYSED Preliminary Enrollment Data for 2023-24 School Year.



underfunded between more than a \$1,000 to up to almost \$5,000 per student.² The exclusion from programs such as the Learn to Work program continues to exacerbate the inequities between district and charter students.

In our city, every student should have equal access to resources that empower them to reach their fullest potential. Programs like Learn to Work play a vital role in leveling the playing field by equipping students with practical skills, real-world experiences, and valuable connections to an already challenging workforce. By ensuring that all students, irrespective of their public-school choice can participate in such initiatives, we not only promote equity but also can foster a community where every student in New York City has a chance to succeed and contribute meaningfully to society.

We ask that you expand the Learn to Work program to include students who attend charter transfer high schools.

² The most recent analysis done by the Independent Budget Office of the City of New York (IBO), an arm of New York City's government, found that NYC charter schools were underfunded between more than a thousand dollars to up to \$4,863. See *With State Formula for Charter School Funding Likely to Change, City Costs to Grow More Than Budgeted*, available at <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/with-state-formula-for-charter-school-funding-likely-to-change-city-costs-to-grow-more-than-budgeted-march-2017.pdf>



Testimony of NY Sun Works

NYC Council Budget and Oversight Hearing

13 March 2025

Thank you, Council Member Joseph and members of the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to speak today and for your ongoing commitment to our public school system.

My name is Megan Nordgrén, and I am the Director of Development and Government Relations with NY Sun Works, a non-profit organization that builds Hydroponic Farm Classrooms in NYC public schools. In our farm classrooms, we use hydroponic technology to educate students and teachers about the science of sustainability and bring quality STEM education through the lens of urban farming. We envision a generation of environmental innovators, empowered to create solutions to global climate challenges. Since opening our first Hydroponic Classroom in 2010, we have partnered with over 350 schools, reaching more than 140,000 students annually in New York City and beyond.

Through our low-cost comprehensive science program, NY Sun Works addresses the critical educational priorities outlined in the Mayor's Management report:

- Educating New York City's children to become productive, engaged adults - our program:
 - Helps students understand their connections to the world around them and how their actions impacts their communities and the environment
 - Promotes civic engagement
 - Hands-on project-based learning, exemplified by the NY Sun Works program, engages students in learning and helps to reduce chronic absenteeism
- Specifically, NY Sun Works:
 - Improves academic achievement through our rich comprehensive science curriculum aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards.
 - Promotes parental involvement in education through our Harvest Program as students bring home the food they grow (with tremendous pride and joy!) and are encouraged to share what they are learning with their families.
 - Hands-on learning helps to engage English language learners and special education students.
 - Through our workforce development program, we are introducing students to green career pathways, providing career readiness skills and creating connections to community colleges.
 - Our rigorous science curriculum prepares elementary, middle and high school students for future success.



NY Sun Works has built Hydroponic farm classrooms in public schools in all but one city council district in NYC - and we have a long list of schools waiting for the program. 54 schools were generously funded by city council members and borough presidents that were supposed to have received their Hydroponic Classrooms Summer 2024 - but the DSF system slowdown has kept those projects from moving forward. We greatly appreciate your support to help to get those projects started asap.

In closing, I thank you for your wonderful support in the past and ask that you continue to support hands-on science programming in DOE K-12 schools to uplift New York's next generation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Megan Nordgrén

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Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair

Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Fiscal Year 2026

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Thank you to Chair Joseph, fellow Committee Members and Council staff, for your passion, leadership, and support of arts education in New York City.

My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. I'm testifying as part of the It Starts with the Arts coalition and Coalition for Equitable Education Funding — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts education in NYC schools and communities.

The past few years have underscored the profound need for spaces where young people can think critically about the world around them, bolster academic success and mental health, and build resilience. That starts with the arts.

However, despite these undeniable benefits, the data reveals a stark reality. Spending on arts education accounts for 3% of NYC Public Schools budget. When adjusted for inflation, NYCPS is budgeting less money on arts education now than we were back 8-10 years ago (\$40.8M). Let alone it being unclear how much money is actually *spent* on arts education. Just 31% of NYC 8th grade students continue to meet NYSED's learning requirements for arts education (consistent since 2015) — ranging from 2% - 62% of students meeting requirements per school district. Additionally, the [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 1 in 5 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school.

More than 700 cultural organizations worked in partnership with schools last year to bridge that gap, broaden access to world-class artists, and provide external funding to schools. Unfortunately, delays in MTAC contracting (averaging 16-28 months by a recent member survey) and delayed payment from DOE cause not only delayed/lost educational opportunities for students but delayed payment/lost employment for our city's teaching artists and creative workforce.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I urge our City to take decisive action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

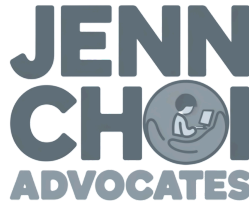
- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) - alongside other education programs on the chopping block previous funding by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds, arts education programs (alongside early childhood, community schools, teacher recruitment, and more) are once again at-risk of being

eliminated. We stand with the Coalition of Equitable Education Funding and call on the city to shift from a one-year restoration to an annual allocation to sustain arts education and other programs currently on the chopping block.

- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teachers (\$39.8M):** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, closing the equity gap for at least 379 schools. This can be done in part by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via supplemental certification program (\$4M) or funding a PE Works-inspired improvement plan.
- **Restore and Enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M):** Build on city’s down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.
- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M):** Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **Improve arts education data transparency around arts education access, participation, and quality by** compelling NYCPS to provide a school-by-school breakdown of the state of arts education in public schools via a Hearing, Legislative Services Request, T&C, and/or Oversight Hearing.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** As a nonprofit who is still waiting to be paid for work done in FY23 and FY24 by NYC Public Schools, our City should establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions and renewals so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to MTAC process within NYCPS).

We want inviting, colorful, vibrant, and thriving communities — that starts with the arts. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kimberly Olsen
Executive Director
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable
Email: kolsen@nycaieroundtable.org



Jenn Choi Advocates, LLC | New York City | 917-432-4323 | jchoi@jennchoiadvocates.com

**Testimony for Education Budget
New York City Council Education Committee (T2025-3049)**

**Proposal: Change the Fair Student Funding Formula
to Reduce 1.3 Billion Dollar Impartial
Hearing Denials of FAPE COSTS**

Dear Chair Joseph and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Education,

Last year, the city spent 1.3 billion dollars¹ to cover the due process complaints who were not provided a Free and Appropriate Public Education by New York City Public Schools. While the city claimed that it was to address the backlog of cases going back 8 years, even dividing this extraordinary number by 8 reflects a tremendous burden to taxpayers and wasted potential for our city school system to do better for students who wish to learn with their peers in the Least Restrictive Environment. That is, they want to learn with their neighbors, in the schools where they earned or were given a seat, fair and square, and be given their appropriate services and access to learn on a leveled playing field. That is their right as New Yorkers and as Americans.

Every year, I come before this committee representing our growing group of NYC Parents of Teens with Disabilities that is now at 1,900 members. We are bonded mostly by our need to help each other protect our children from the ableism and lies told to us by New York City Public Schools. We know that they tell us ICT (integrated co-teaching) can be for any class. We have seen their own rules and regulations that they give to their own staff. Please know that ICT is the practice of bringing in a special education teacher to collaborate with a general education teacher on a full-time basis for every hour the class meets including planning time for the duo to ensure access and participation for all students in the class, therefore “More Inclusive.”

¹ <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-spent-13b-on-private-education-for-students-with-disabilities-last-year>

Moreover, at the latest Special Education Chancellor Town Hall hosted by elected parents Citywide Council of Special Education, New York City Public Schools, again claimed with Chancellor Aviles Ramos present, a top level NYC Special Education Official, stated: (1 minute video here: <https://bit.ly/ICT-for-ANYTHING>)

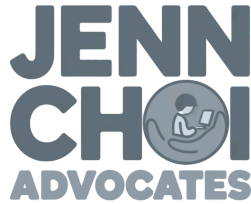
- “..ICT can be offered for CTE classes” and
- “..please know that ICT may be recommended for all of our classes. There are not limitations.”

This effectively means that a special education co-teacher can be there to support so many types of classes such as the very popular FutureReady NYC classes in HVAC, Pre-Nursing, Cybersecurity, and other ready-to-work-post-high-school-certificate programs. These classes prepare students for rigorous examinations that are expensive in the market post-high school. Failure to recognize that students’ disabilities do not impact them in these classes but only impact them in Math, Science, Social Studies, and English, fools no parent. If anything, the failure to provide ICT otherwise known as “More Inclusive >=60%.” matches the Fair Student Funding Weight because anything special education teacher service costs that goes over 60% (Math+Social Studies+ELA+Science =57% of a student’s educational day in high school), would not bring more money to a school.

The same goes for World Language, a graduation requirement, and AP- Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate (IB), or in-building College Level Classes that can allow students with disabilities to earn college credits and save their families money and further ensure completion of a degree.

SY 2025-2026 Proposed Fair Student Funding Weights			
		Grade Base Weight	Weight
		Grades K-5	1.00
		Grades 6-8	1.08
		Grades 9-12	1.03
Academic Intervention*		Weight	
Poverty K-12	0.12		
Below Standards 4-5	0.25		
Below Standards 6-8	0.35		
Below Standards 9-12	0.25		
Well Below Standards 4-5	0.40		
Well Below Standards 6-8	0.50		
Well Below Standards 9-12	0.40		
Heavy Graduation Challenge (OAUC) 2			
Over-the-Counter (OTC) 9-12	0.40		
Students in Temporary Housing		Weight	
Students in Temporary Housing	0.12		
English Language Learners		Weight	
Standalone English as a New Language (ENL) K-5	0.40		
Standalone English as a New Language (ENL) 6-12	0.50		
Bilingual K-5	0.44		
Bilingual 6-12	0.55		
Commanding K-5	0.13		
Commanding 6-12	0.12		
Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)	0.12		
		Special Education	Weight
		Low Intensity <=20%	0.56
		Moderate Intensity 21% to 59%	1.25
		Less Inclusive >=60% K-8	1.18
		Less Inclusive >=60% 9-12	0.58
		More Inclusive >=60% K	2.09
		More Inclusive >=60% 1-12	1.74
		Post IEP Transitional Support	0.12
		Portfolio High Schools	Weight
		Career and Technical Education (CTE) Tier 1	0.26
		Career and Technical Education (CTE) Tier 2	0.17
		Career and Technical Education (CTE) Tier 3	0.12
		Career and Technical Education (CTE) Tier 4	0.05
		Specialized Academic	0.25
		Specialized Audition	0.35
		Transfer Heavy Challenge (OAUC) ¹	0.40
		Transfer Non-Heavy Challenge	0.21
		Concentration of Needs	Weight
		Concentration Need Tier 3	0.12
		Concentration Need Tier 2	0.08
		Concentration Need Tier 1	0.04

Taken from the Citywide Council on High Schools Meeting 3.12.2025 In-Person and Virtual 52 Chambers Street, N.Y., NY



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Because of this unfair formula, **schools IGNORE their own rules that were created to ensure our schools would follow state and federal law.** Thus, every year, parents will often hear or be written in an email that there is:

- “No ICT for Language other than English” even though it’s a graduation requirement
- “No ICT for CTE any class” even though it will help a student pass these rigorous expensive exams
- “No ICT for AP in any class ” even though they earned their seat in that class which amounts to a civil rights violation.
- No SETSS with ICT
- No 1:1 SETSS (Please know that a school will be paid the same for 1:1 SETSS as they would for SETSS for a group of 8 which is completely unfair given the intense difference in human resource needs)

to me

Good morning

I hope you are well! Congratulations to your child! It's great to have so many options. Below, please find the answers to your questions:

1. We only have ICT programming for the 4 main content areas (ELA, Math, Social Studies, & Science). We don't offer ICT for CTE, LOTE, or AP/Honors courses, but students with active IEPs will still receive any testing accommodations required.

2. We only have one CTE program in Business. We do offer the following academies to incoming 9th graders though: Media, Culinary, JROTC, Computer Engineering, Law & Legal Studies, and Art/Dance. Again, those courses are not taught by a special education teacher, but students do continue to receive any testing accommodations per their IEP.

3. The business courses are titled as such on the transcript/report card.

Please let me know if you have any more questions.

Take care and good luck to your child!

Thanks,

AP of Special Education

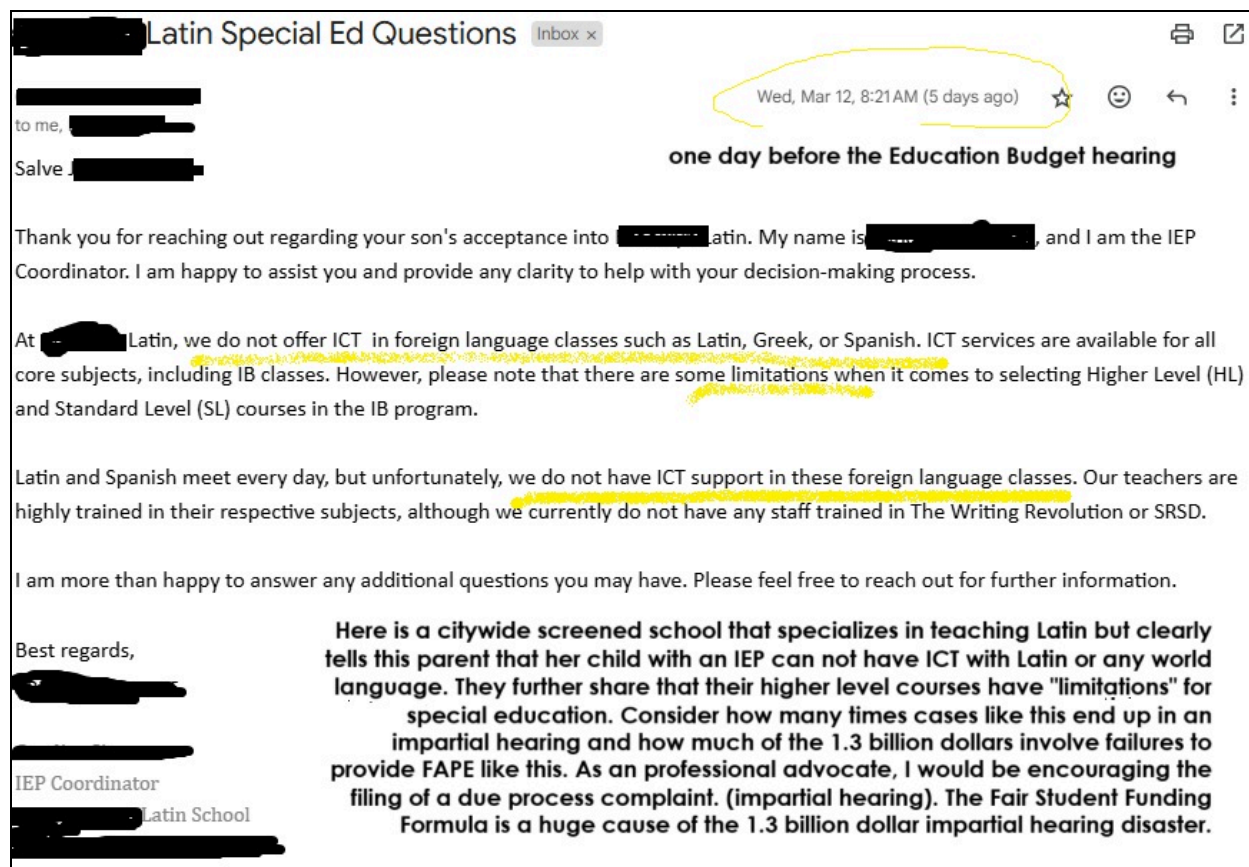
High School

Tue, Mar 11, 11:56 AM (6 days ago)

just two days before the hearing

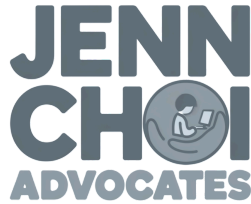
With over 1600 students, over 20% of whom have IEPs, with an Economic Need Index at over 80%, the population of the Latinx and Black students is over 90%. Thankfully, this school is a Future Ready NYC Partner School however, witness how freely this special education Asst Principal violates the law in this written form despite the regulations provided to the district year after year. Thus it is quite clear that any student with a disability entering that program at this school can not have their needs fully considered given the attitude displayed by this email. This can and should lead to an impartial hearing. How could it not?

This means that all of this can and has caused so much damage that parents have filed impartial hearings that have partially led to the 1.3 billion dollars.



Please understand that impartial hearings don't happen just because a school doesn't provide ICT for one class at one time. New York City public school parents have a lot more patience than that.

It's because of the very clear discriminatory pattern of special education provision forced by the Fair Student Funding Formula in which nothing past the 60% of special education teacher service (those four core subjects) is provided to the school. **That means that any student who falls outside the 60% box, the student will suffer, due to lack of appropriate services, they will increasingly fall further away from the 60% box. Hence they will eventually need to file an impartial hearing that will require tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars in compensatory education services and/or tuition reimbursement to an expensive private nonpublic school that is outside of what the student and family originally wished for the child.** Thus, it often starts with being denied one needed service such as ICT +



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_____ or SETSS + ICT, SETSS 1:1, etc, then another, and another because whatever is outside of the box is something for which the school will not be funded.

In my last testimony in which 313 parents² co-signed stating that The Fair Student Funding Formula is Not Fair to Students with Disabilities and their Peers and Teachers by Extension was also sent to Chancellor Aviles-Ramos on February 4, 2025. Sadly, our community did not receive a response.

Chair Joseph and the education committee, we know you have so many priorities that require your attention and we know that the Fair Student Funding Formula is a problem that can not be solved easily.

That said, we are grateful that you are here to hear our voices. We wish for you to put pressure on the city to make our budget better for students with disabilities but we also need these persistent malignancies to stop. Otherwise, as we are now, we will always be drowning in a state of going nowhere for students with disabilities in which the district mostly proudly marks their achievement with the expansion of Specialized Programs like the ASD Nest program where “parents are banging down our doors.”³ Still it needs to be said that these fine programs are not available to every student who needs them. Most importantly, it is NOT FUNDED BY THE FAIR STUDENT FUNDED FORMULA.

Thank you,

Jenn Choi

Principal, Advocate

jchoi@jennchoiadvocates.com

Jenn Choi Advocates, LLC

Founder, NYC Parents of Teens with Disabilities (1,900 members as of March 2025)

² <https://bit.ly/finalFSFnoFairTestimony>

³ This was said at the Special Education oversight hearing by the New York City Public Schools regarding specialized programs vs. nonpublic special education schools



**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Education
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13, 2025**

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

[NYLCV's annual New York City top priorities](#) include decarbonizing our transportation and building sectors. This is especially important to New York City's school buses and public school buildings, both of which are overwhelmingly fueled by fossil fuels, not only contributing to climate change but to harmful public health impacts such as asthma. For FY26, NYLCV urges the City to prioritize the City's electric school bus law and sustainably retrofit NYC public schools.

Implement the NYC Zero Emission School Bus Law

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Retrofit NYC Schools

The vast majority of NYC's GHG emissions come from our buildings. Making matters worse, many of the City's public schools are in older buildings that still run on fossil fuels, contributing to air pollution and poor indoor air quality. As highlighted in our [2025 NYC Policy Agenda](#), the City must continue implementing Local Law 97, which requires that City-owned buildings reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2025 and 50 percent by 2030, as well as the City's school electrification effort, [Leading the Charge](#), a \$4 billion plan to begin retrofitting 100 schools to all-electric heating and build only electricity-powered new school buildings by 2030. This includes green technology such as solar panels, thermal energy networks, and upgrading current building systems to be more energy efficient to make our schools cleaner and reduce emissions. Moreover, as the Administration stated in [PowerUp NYC](#), the City should consider school retrofit projects as an educational and job training opportunity for students. For instance, placing solar infrastructure on schools provides a unique opportunity to teach students about clean energy and climate change and develop training pathways to well-paying green jobs.

In addition to sustainably retrofitting NYC schools to reduce emissions and improve air quality, the City must retrofit them holistically and take climate resiliency and adaptation into account. According to [data that the City's Comptroller's Office shared with City Limits](#), over a quarter of the city's public school buildings, 28 percent, are currently at risk of extreme stormwater flooding. Indeed, according to the Comptroller's Office, "by 2050, there will be 77 public schools facing a dual threat: at risk of being hit by 'high' intensity stormwater events—defined in the analysis as 3.5 inches of rain per hour—while also located on a floodplain that is vulnerable to coastal flooding."

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
151 West 30th Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001-4017

**Testimony of Michelle Kraus, Manager, Social Work and Intake Services
Disability Justice Program, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Before the New York City Council
Committee on Education: Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13, 2025**

,
Good afternoon, Chairperson Joseph and members of the City Council Committee on Education. My name is Michelle Kraus, and I serve as the Social Work Manager in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your dedication to ensuring that students with disabilities receive the education and support they deserve.

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis in NYC Public Schools

I urge the City Council to increase funding for mental health services in New York City public schools, particularly for students with disabilities. Too many of these students are struggling in silence, and the statistics are alarming:

- In 2023, half of surveyed NYC teenagers reported mild to severe symptoms of depression, contributing to school avoidance and chronic absenteeism “Youth mental health is an escalating crisis — this New York City scheme may offer a route out”, *World Economic Forum*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/03/youth-mental-health-partnerships/>.
- About 46% of the city’s 200,000 students with disabilities were chronically absent in the 2022-23 school year. In District 75, which serves students with significant disabilities who cannot be accommodated in neighborhood schools, nearly 60% were chronically absent. That compared to a citywide average of 36%. “How to get ‘school avoidant’ students with disabilities back to class? Lawsuit pushes for solutions.”, *Chalkbeat*, October 8, 2024, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/10/08/nyc-failing-school-avoidant-students-with-disabilities-lawsuit-says/>

Approximately 26% of transgender and questioning students attempted suicide in the past year compared with 5% of cisgender male and 11% of cisgender female students. “Disparities in School Connectedness, Unstable Housing, Experiences of Violence, Mental Health, and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Transgender and Cisgender High School Students, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2023”, *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Report*,

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/su/su7304a6.htm?utm>.

NYLPI's report 2023 report, "A Crisis in Special Education: New York City's Failure to Educate Students Classified with 'Emotional Disability'" New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

[https://www.nylpi.org/wp-](https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SSD_ProBonoDocument_11_27_2023_09.pdf)

[content/uploads/2023/11/SSD_ProBonoDocument_11_27_2023_09.pdf](https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SSD_ProBonoDocument_11_27_2023_09.pdf), exposes systemic failures by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) in identifying, classifying, and serving special education students. Schools lack essential resources, and there is a chronic shortage of special education teachers, mental health professionals, and related service providers. The DOE has acknowledged that one in five students needing mental health support does not receive it. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/health-and-wellness/mental-health?utm>

The Mayor's preliminary budget for FY 2026 does not renew funding for **school-based mental health clinics**, which previously received \$3.6 million through the Mental Health Continuum. Without this funding, students will be left without critical mental health services. This funding must be secured forthwith.

We urge the City Council to ensure funding for the following additional priorities for its FY 2026 budget:

- **Hiring more school-based mental health professionals**—psychologists, social workers, and counselors trained in disability services;
- **Expanding school-based therapy programs** to provide early intervention before crises emerge; and
- **Funding professional development** to equip teachers and staff with tools to support students' mental health needs.

Investing in school-based mental health services is an investment in academic success, student well-being, and the future of our city. Our students cannot wait any longer.

Electric School Buses: A Step Toward Sustainability and Public Health

The transition to electric school buses is a crucial initiative for improving air quality and reducing health risks for NYC's children. Diesel-powered buses contribute to air pollution and respiratory illnesses, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. By shifting to electric buses, the City can:

- Eliminate harmful emissions and improve air quality;
- Reduce carbon emissions to meet climate goals outlined in the Climate Mobilization Act and the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act;
- Lower long-term costs through reduced maintenance and fuel expenses; and
- Create jobs in the green technology sector, fostering economic growth.

We urge the City Council to prioritize funding for electric school buses, as well as related charging infrastructure and workforce development, to ensure a successful and equitable transition to cleaner transportation.

Addressing Inequities in High School Sports for Black and Latinx Students

The DOE fully funds after-school sports programs through the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL), yet historic inequities persist in access to sports for Black and Latinx students. The “small schools” initiative and restrictive policies have exacerbated disparities, leaving many students with few or no opportunities to participate in athletics.

NYLPI, alongside Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLP, represents plaintiffs in *Jimenez v. NYCDOE*, a class-action lawsuit challenging racial discrimination in access to high school sports. The DOE is currently in breach of the settlement agreement, and funding shortfalls should not be used as an excuse for failing to meet its obligations.

We call on the City Council to:

- **Provide additional funding for sports programs** at underfunded high schools serving Black and Latinx students;
- **Support the creation of new sports teams** where access is most limited; and
- **Ensure equitable distribution of resources** for all student-athletes.

Participation in sports significantly benefits students’ academic, social, emotional, and physical development. The DOE must allocate sufficient funding and resources to eliminate these long-standing disparities and ensure all students have equal opportunities to engage in athletics.

New York City’s FY 2026 Budget

The Trump administration poses an unprecedented threat to the rule of law and to New Yorkers’ freedoms, civil rights, access to services, and access to a healthy environment. New York City legislators must now leverage the substantial power of local government to uphold our laws and rights, and to make the major investments needed to protect and strengthen infrastructure, public institutions, and the renewable energy economy.

New York City’s Independent Budget Office and State Comptroller DiNapoli have both found that New York City’s economic outlook remains strong, and they project significant budget surpluses for FY 2025.

In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flatlining. At the same time a federal administration hostile to immigrants, LGBTQ New Yorkers, people with disabilities, and climate science threatens New York City communities and has already begun to seize funds allocated to our city. It is more critical than ever that the City’s budget makes bold investments in public services, legal representation, and the transition to a local renewable energy economy, and it is more critical than ever that the City Council and our mayor stand up for New York City’s communities and independence.

New York City’s Immigrant Health Initiative

We ask the Council to continue and enhance support for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which continues to save lives and improve health across our city. This program is funded at \$2.43M in FY25 and supports more than 20 organizations, including NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers and their families through direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Such access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net health care system when people can resume work and productive lives.

As increasing numbers of New Yorkers are detained in immigration jails, we are one of few organizations focused on medical advocacy and the acute health hazards of immigration detention. In addition, in the face of continued attacks on the asylum process, we have offered culturally competent legal representation, including to those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, or live with HIV.

NYLPI'S Nonprofit Rapid Response Network

The new federal administration is focusing tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those who stand up to it. The human cost to New York's disadvantaged communities will be staggering. Nonprofits and community-based organizations (CBOs) serving or employing immigrants and other marginalized groups will form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need. See NYLPI's recently published guidance for nonprofits responding to the threat of immigration enforcement, <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Guidance-to-Nonprofits-Regarding-Immigration-Enforcement.pdf>.

With support from the Speaker's request and Protect NYC Families, NYLPI's Nonprofit Rapid Response Network will strengthen and protect New York City's nonprofit sector by providing informational resources, relationship-building, practical training, and legal advice and representation to nonprofits and CBOs. It will foster collaboration, build capacity, and distribute essential resources and legal advice to help nonprofits survive attacks by the federal administration.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions related to our education work or supply additional information and thank you for your attention to and focus on New York City's students.

Michelle Kraus
mkraus@nylpi.org

For almost 50 years, NYLPI has fought to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue disability, health, immigrant, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it's needed most.

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program protects and promotes the educational rights of students with disabilities in New York City. Our attorneys, social workers, and other advocates use a variety of approaches to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the Free Appropriate Public Education mandated by federal and state law, including advice and technical assistance, advocacy at special education meetings and mediations, and direct and pro bono representation at due process hearings. NYLPI also engages in impact litigation, provides special education training to students, parents, and advocates, and has developed educational materials to assist parents and advocates in special education advocacy.

For more information visit: www.nylpi.org



January 28, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning, esteemed members of the City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26. My name is Diane Sanlatte and I am the director of Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, a small private daycare in Brooklyn dedicated to providing early childhood education with a unique and enriching theater-based approach. I am here to advocate for prioritizing the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares like ours to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services to families across New York City.

As a small business, Pantomima is currently facing significant financial challenges due to the declining ability of families to afford private daycare. Families in our community, particularly in Sunset Park, are in need of affordable, high-quality early education options, and small centers like ours are eager to meet that demand. However, without adequate financial support and inclusion in the Department of Education's (DOE) 3K and Universal Pre-K programs, our ability to continue operating—and expanding—will be severely compromised.

Pantomima is in the midst of expanding to a second location in Sunset Park, where we plan to create five classrooms specifically designed to offer 3K services. This expansion is a testament to our dedication to supporting the educational and developmental needs of young children in this underserved community. However, this effort requires financial stability and partnership with the DOE to ensure sustainability. Without contracts and budgetary prioritization, this initiative may falter, leaving children in the community without critical early education opportunities.

The consequences of neglecting small private daycares like ours go far beyond the survival of individual businesses. The following are the ripple effects of major budgetary cuts and lack of support:

1. **Job Losses:** Our daycare provides jobs for educators, caregivers, and administrative staff—many of whom are members of minority communities. Budgetary cuts threaten their livelihoods and, by extension, the economic stability of their families.
2. **Educational Opportunities for Future Generations:** Early childhood education is a cornerstone of lifelong learning and success. Cutting funds for 3K and Universal Pre-K services means fewer children will have access to the foundational skills they need to thrive in school and beyond.
3. **Equity for Minority-Owned Businesses:** Small, minority-owned businesses like ours rely on DOE contracts to remain financially viable. Without these opportunities, minorities striving to expand their businesses and contribute to the local economy will face insurmountable barriers.

We urge the City Council to recognize the vital role that small daycares play in providing accessible, high-quality education to families and to allocate sufficient funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget to support these centers. By extending contracts for 3K and Universal Pre-K services, you are not just investing in the present—you are securing the future of New York City's children, families, and communities.

In conclusion, Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids is committed to supporting our community and expanding our services, but we cannot do it alone. We need your partnership and support to ensure that families in New York City have access to affordable, high-quality early education. Please prioritize this in the upcoming budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Diane Samlatte
Executive Director
Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids



**PARENTS
SUPPORTING
PARENTS**
NEW YORK

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Parents Supporting Parents NY

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the proposed education budget.

My name is Tanesha Grant, and I am the executive director at Parents Supporting Parents NY.

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in

the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had

been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

As the mother of 3 and the grandmother of 4 children who need special education services, it is vital that our education programs are fully funded. My grandkids need access to preschool special education classes. We represent all the parents and families in Harlem and Washington Heights who don't have access to these services. We need more seats for children with autism and other disabilities. I have been fighting for education funding for these programs since my children were in school. Now I fight for my grandchildren and all the students across the 5 boroughs to ensure that our students have an abundance of resources in their public education.

We would also like to advocate for a full implementation of Black Studies Curriculum in all NYCPS's as promised. We want superintendent and principal accountability in making sure Black Studies Curriculum is being used in the classroom. There must be sustained professional development for our educators going forward. This means ongoing training to effectively teach Black Studies. Finally we demand that Black Studies Curriculum is promoted to the public, just

as NYC Reads and NYC Solves. We must also make sure to pair the 3 together in a holistic manner. Parents like us worked together to get culturally responsive sustaining education passed at PEP in 2019. We started this work in 2017. Our children need to see themselves positively in what they are learning. For too long curriculum has been whitewashed and culturally harmful for our Black students. With the help of Black Educators now we have a foundation and we are fully committed to holding NYCPS and City Council accountable to make sure this amazing work continues to the benefits of our students. All our students should learn Black studies curriculum.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

3-K programs for thousands of young children (\$112M);

Preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities (\$55M);

Extended day seats for 3-K and Pre-K to help meet the needs of working parents (\$25M);

Outreach efforts to help ensure families are aware of the early childhood programs available to them (\$5M);

Arts programming so that students can get exposure to the arts in their schools (\$41M);

More than 50 community schools – providing after-school programs, mental healthcare, food pantries, and more to school communities (\$14M);

Restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (\$12M);

Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as well as the new class size requirements (\$10M);

The Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn (\$5M);

Immigrant family communication and outreach to help ensure families can receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access (\$4M);

High-impact tutoring to help students get the support they need in reading and math (\$4M); and

Student Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college (\$3.3M).

We join with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. We also join with the coalition in calling on the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

Finally, we want to mention our deep concern that Governor Hochul's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula would result in New York City schools getting \$350 million less than they would under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor

and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive more resources to NYC schools and certainly do not result in our schools receiving less money than they would under the current formula.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Parents Supporting Parents NY
Executive Director
Tanesha Grant



**Presented before the New York City Council
Committee on Education
Re: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education
March 13, 2025**

Thank you Chair Rita Joseph and members of the Council Education Committee for the opportunity to testify at the Committee on Education's Preliminary Budget Hearing. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record.

Since 1908, Partnership with Children (PWC) has strengthened the emotional, social, and cognitive skills of children in New York City to succeed in school, society, and life. We place licensed clinical social workers and teaching artists in schools to provide young people growing up in poverty with trauma-informed mental health counseling, community-based programming, and healing-based arts education. Through this approach, our students build the skills necessary to break cycles of poverty and become advocates for their communities. PWC's youth mental health, healing arts, and community-based programming impacts over 22,000 children, families, and community members across 47 NYC public schools. In 2015, PWC began partnering with the Office of Community Schools as a lead community based organization in community schools across the city.

We would like to thank Speaker Adrienne Adams and the members of the City Council for their continued support of our services to support New York City students.

Supporting Student Mental Wellness

While recent citywide data on NYC student wellness is limited, a March 2023 report released by the Mayor's Office, highlighted that in 2021, 20% of children aged 3 to 13 experienced one or more emotional, development or behavioral challenges. Moreover, nearly 40% of New York City high school students shared that they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks during that past year. Latinx and Black students were most at risk as in the same survey, 42% of Latinx and 41% of Black students reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness in comparison to 30% of White students. Despite this reality, the Department of Education (DOE) reports that about 20% of students who would benefit from mental-health support services do not receive them. Community schools are a key mechanism to address these challenges.

As a lead community based organization in community schools across the city, we know first hand the positive impact community schools have on children and families. By addressing the social and emotional challenges that undermine achievement, community schools increase



attendance, improve academic outcomes, improve student behavior and school climate, and more effective teaching. In short, community schools make schools safer and better places to learn so that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Additionally, as a supportive pillar of PWC school-based programming, PWC uses arts to address the trauma that impacts students' lives, while simultaneously strengthening the ecosystem of relationships surrounding them in their school environments. PWC work supports students' abilities to analyze, share, and interpret their experiences, assuring they are active contributors in shaping their communities and futures. Our work serves as an example of how arts education can foster mental wellness and healing.

Recommendations

We are encouraged by the Council and Mayor's efforts to address the mental wellness of students. To do this effectively, we must prioritize community schools and healing based arts programming. To that end, we recommend the following:

- **Invest in and Protect Community Schools:** As a lead community based organization in community schools across the city, we know first hand the positive impact community schools have on children and families. By addressing the social and emotional challenges that undermine achievement, community schools increase attendance, improve academic outcomes, improve student behavior and school climate, and more effective teaching.
- **Support Healing Based Arts Programming:** As a supportive pillar of PWC school-based programming, PWC uses arts to address the trauma that impacts students' lives, while simultaneously strengthening the ecosystem of relationships surrounding them in their school environments. PWC work supports students' abilities to analyze, share, and interpret their experiences, assuring they are active contributors in shaping their communities and futures. Our work serves as an example of how arts education can foster mental wellness and healing.

Thank you again for your partnership and the opportunity to submit written testimony. Please contact Jerry Hyppolite, Chief of Staff at jhyppolite@partnershipwithchildren.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



newyorkedge.org

**NYC Council FY 26
Preliminary Budget Hearings –**

**Education Committee
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair**

**Children & Youth Committee
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Health Committee
Hon. Lynn Schulman Chair**

Submitted by Rachael Gazdick, CEO

Thank you Madame Chairs and Members of the Committees for the Council's long standing support of **New York Edge (NYE)** and our mission of bridging the opportunity gap among students in underinvested communities.

With the Council as our partner these past 33 years, we have grown from a small, wrap-around summer program to the LARGEST provider of after-school and summer programming in New York City. On behalf of the 33,000 00 students served by New York Edge in over 100 schools throughout the five boroughs, I ask for your help as we seek increased funding in the upcoming budget in alignment with our impact and scale. Increased funding will also help mitigate some of the challenges which have occurred as a result of the city's Passport System (causing significant reimbursement/payment delays).

Our Council Citywide funding has remained at \$1M for the past 15 years despite the fact that we have tripled in size and have significantly increased the number of children served. To continue providing this level of service and to meet the growing demands placed on us, especially as we are often asked to step in to provide programming and services when other organizations are struggling, I ask that that our Council Citywide funding reflect this expansion and that you support our FY 26 funding requests:

- **\$1.2M under the Council's After-School Enrichment Initiative - an increase of approximately \$200,000 over our FY 25 allocation.**
- **\$250,000 under the Council's Social & Emotional Supports for Students Initiative. We are, as identified by Mosaic by ACT, the largest after-school provider in the nation providing SEL supports.**

New York Edge was created 33 years ago at the suggestion of the New York City Council to provide free wrap-around summer camps for youngsters attending summer school. At that time such camps, which provided sports and arts activities as well as academic help, did not

exist. With the Council as its partner, New York Edge was at the forefront of the movement to provide free summer camp programming to our city's youth.

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

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

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

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

- **98%** of New York Edge parents agree that their child feels a sense of belonging;
- **98%** of New York Edge parents agree that their child feels able to approach program staff for help with academics or social matters;
- **94.4%** of New York Edge parents would recommend New York Edge to other parents;

- **18%** improvement was made in ELA and Math scores after New York Edge tutoring;
- **96.8%** of New York Edge parents agree that New York Edge is helping to prepare their child for future success in

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

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

New York Edge school-based programs run before or after the school day, year-round (including Saturdays, over the summer, and holiday periods). Council citywide funding under the ***After-School Enrichment Initiative*** enables us to enrich and expand our programming throughout the city and has allowed us to develop and implement unique and engaging programs such as:

- ***FORMATIVE*** – our nationally recognized student led podcast and winner of the prestigious Anthem Community Voice Award in the Education, Art, and Culture - Podcast or Audio category. *Formative* connects middle school students with diverse leaders and role models for conversations on important topics including childhood, personal growth and careers. The podcase empowers students to develop their skills in research, public speaking and interviewing.
- **Book Publishing Program** – New York Edge students across the city, in collaboration with award-winning children's book author Jesse Byrd and a roster of professional illustrators,

write and publish their own stories, gaining joy and insight into the creating writing process and strengthening literacy skills along the way.

- **Heart for Art** – an arts education program powered by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and DHL Express. Designed to inspire children in communities with limited access to cultural education with the art and life story of Vincent Van Gogh, this program engaged 20 teachers across five NYC schools when it was launched in spring 2022. As of September 2022, the program has expanded to 10 NYC school with more on the horizon. Through this innovative arts education program, students have, through the study of Van Gogh’s life and work, received inspiration for their own creative pursuits.
- **Read Across New York Edge** – our new exciting literacy initiative launched last year. During the first week in March, over 50 acclaimed children’s book authors visited schools across the city to read and share their love of storytelling with New York Edge students. As part of the Read Across New York Edge curriculum, students will spent time reading and engaging in creating projects centered around the themes of participating authors books.

Sustained Council funding through the years has also enabled us to become one of the city’s largest providers of college access programs.

Funding under the ***Social & Emotional Supports for Students*** Initiative will enable us to support our current SEL programming providing high quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning assessments, curriculum and resources to all of our partner schools, the students we serve and their families.

New York Edge, its students, and families are extraordinarily grateful for the past 33 years of support from the New York City Council. **The time has come, however, where increased funding is VITALLY needed.** Unlike contracts with DYCD and other agencies, Council discretionary contracts are not (and have never been) eligible for COLA increases. This is making it increasingly difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality staff and to

continue to offer the wide array of STEM, SEL, Visual & Performing Arts, Sports, Health & Wellness and College & Career Readiness programs that we are known for.

We are now looking to you to meet the needs of the next generation of young people by supporting our FY 26 citywide funding requests. **These funds will enable us to keep providing youth throughout the city with the edge they need to succeed!**

Thank you.



The Critical Role of New York Edge at Brownsville Academy

My name is Aaliyah Clark, and I am a 12th-grade student at Brownsville Academy High School. I am writing to share my perspective on why New York Edge is an indispensable partner for our school and why sustaining their funding is so essential.

New York Edge is more than just a partner—they are a lifeline for our community. They provide extensive support that touches every aspect of our school life:

- Academic & Career Support:

New York Edge organizes college tours and hosts numerous events and workshops. They assist with post-secondary college applications, career readiness, cover letter and resume writing, and even offer CPR training and language support through tools like Rosetta Stone. Their guidance helps us prepare effectively for our future.

- Emotional & Mental Health Support:

Their support extends to our mental well-being by offering workshops for parents and providing resources that ensure we have a stable and caring environment both in and out of school.

- Practical & Financial Assistance:

They supply our school with a well-stocked pantry that includes food, clothes, school supplies, and hygiene products—essentials that many students frequently rely on. Additionally, the laundry room is always equipped with detergent. New York Edge also funds school trips, supports students with resources like glasses and dental care, and even provides a breakfast club every day.

This comprehensive support system makes our experience at Brownsville Academy more engaging and less stressful. It enables us to focus on our studies and personal growth while knowing that practical needs are met.

Given the wide-ranging benefits that New York Edge brings to our school community, I truly believe that maintaining and increasing funding for their programs—and for the new buildings they help sustain—is absolutely necessary. Their contributions not only improve our academic performance but also enrich our overall well-being, making our journey through high school a more fulfilling and supported experience.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider the importance of New York Edge to our school community. I am hopeful that with continued support, these invaluable services will remain available to all students.

Sincerely,

Aaliyah Clark

Brownsville Academy High School

12th Grade



Good day members of the City Council Committee on Education,

My name is Trinity Williams, and I'm an 8th-grade student who participates in **New York Edge** afterschool programming at Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School. I'm here today because after-school programs are not just extra activities they are necessary. They give students like me a place to feel safe, stay motivated, and discover what we're capable of.

I'll be honest when the last bell rings, a lot of kids don't want to just go straight home. Not because we don't love our families, but because we want to be around our friends, learn new things, and have experiences we wouldn't get anywhere else. After-school programs give us that.

For example, I've been involved in STEM, Cosmetology, Sports, Leadership, Art, and STEP through my **New York Edge** after-school program. Each one has helped me grow in different ways. STEM showed me how creative science can be, Cosmetology taught me about self-care and confidence, Sports pushed me to work harder, Leadership made me speak up, Art let me express myself, and STEP gave me a sense of teamwork and rhythm.

And it's not just about what we do in the building we also get to experience things outside of school. We take fun trips that open our eyes to new opportunities. One of my proudest moments happened because of my **New York Edge** after-school program. Back in December, I was nominated to play in the girls' league at MetLife Stadium. At first, I didn't even want to go I doubted myself. But when I stepped onto that field, it changed everything. Seeing my face on the jumbo screen, knowing my mom was in the stands so proud of me, I realized I was capable of more than I thought. That moment might not have happened without New York Edge.

After-school programs don't just keep kids busy. They help us find our passions, build confidence, and make memories that stay with us forever. They also help parents who work late know that their kids are in a safe, positive place instead of home alone or out in the streets.

I know funding isn't always easy, but investing in **New York Edge** after-school programs means investing in students like me. We are the future of this city, and the support we get now will shape the kind of people we become.

So please, continue to support and fund **New York Edge**. It truly makes a difference.

Thank you,

Trinity Williams

Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School

8th Grade

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Alondra Tiros, and I am a Youth Health Promoter (YHP) at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

I am a senior at Midwood High School. From a young age, my mother created an open and welcoming space for discussions about sexual and reproductive healthcare with my family. I remember how, even in spite of the stigma these conversations may carry, she was always transparent and clear in her words. She didn't shy away from difficult topics, emphasizing the importance of protecting ourselves and maintaining healthy relationships.

Being part of the YHP program has given me the opportunity to challenge and debunk many common misconceptions about sexual and reproductive healthcare while making meaningful connections. This program has empowered me to openly discuss sex education with my peers, something I previously might have found difficult or uncomfortable. Through the knowledge I've gained, I've been able to explain the importance of sex education in a way that feels non-judgmental and open. I can now confidently share information with others, even those being my own family members, ensuring they have accurate information that can help them make informed decisions about their health. In today's political climate, it's important to emphasize the need for these resources. We must encourage our communities to remain open-minded, to be active listeners and show an understanding of the challenges others are currently facing behind closed doors.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers

rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city. I have seen, firsthand, the positive impact the YHP program has had on my peers and me. The program allows us confidently discuss health care topics with our friends so they can lead a healthy lifestyle and make informed decisions. Because many young people do not attend schools that offer a comprehensive sexuality education program, the YHP program is vital in filling a critical knowledge gap.

Research has consistently shown that comprehensive sexual health education works. Positive youth development education, that focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality is crucial in helping young people to make health-promoting decisions and can help shift broader cultural ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. During a time when

the federal government has increased its efforts to curb access to comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexuality education and focus on abstinence only, “risk avoidance” education and health care, it is important that the Council invests in organizations that work to ensure young people have access to sexuality education to promote positive youth development education, healthy relationships and communication, that is crucial in helping young people to make healthy life decisions.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers depend on care offered at PPGNY and we look to the Council to continue to support our ability to do so.

We are deeply grateful to the Council for its enduring support, especially during difficult times like these.

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Elizabeth Sheldon, and I am a volunteer at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs—including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

In addition to relying on Planned Parenthood for annual visits and birth control throughout college, I have been a clinic escort at the Manhattan Health Clinic every 4th Saturday since 2016. I have watched hundreds of patients brave the worst kind of harassment to access essential healthcare—from abusive language to physical intimidation. That patients are willing to endure that kind of treatment to make it to their appointments should say everything about how necessary Planned Parenthood is. Planned Parenthood is known as a space for safe, non-judgmental sexual healthcare access and answers—and without it, these members of our community are often at the mercy of Crisis Pregnancy Centers or religious groups that intentionally mislead them with dangerous misinformation about their own bodies, something I have watched happen many times. Some of the moments that stand out the most are when someone without an appointment and an urgent need for care asks if they can walk in to ask for help—and the relief they express when we say yes. Planned Parenthood is a vital resource for everything related to reproductive healthcare, from testing to abortion care to cancer screening, and the health of this city depends on it.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been

forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are

still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers depend on care offered at PPGNY and we look to the Council to continue to support our ability to do so.

We are deeply grateful to the Council for its enduring support, especially during difficult times like these.

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Emily Pena, and I am a volunteer at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

When people ask me why Planned Parenthood is so important to me, I think back to my parents' homeland, Dominican Republic. I think about the lack of education there is on sexually transmitted diseases and the misinformation that spreads about sexual health in general. And to have access to it here is such a privilege that should be given to everyone. To be self-aware and to protect not only yourself but others. It's important for all ages and Planned Parenthood has been a known safe haven for many answers and questions. To take this away is like taking a fundamental right.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

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with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers depend on care offered at PPGNY and we look to the Council to continue to support our ability to do so.

We are deeply grateful to the Council for its enduring support, especially during difficult times like these.

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Ilyssa Lapp, and I am a volunteer at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

My involvement with PPGNY has given me the knowledge and resources to educate my community about the full range of support Planned Parenthood makes available to them - so much more than people realize. Beyond providing abortions, PPGNY offers essential services like cancer screenings, birth control, gender-affirming care, and sex education, all of which help people take control of their health and lives. Access to sexual and reproductive health care isn't just about medicine; it's about autonomy. Everyone deserves the ability to make informed choices about their bodies without barriers, and that's why this work is so important to me and has driven me to build a career and future investing in it.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten

Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

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Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

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**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good morning. My name is Maryam Mohammed-Miller, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I would like to thank the Chair of the Committee on Education, Council Member Joseph, and all the committee members for the opportunity to discuss PPGNY's programs, services, and fiscal year 2026 funding requests. I would also like to thank the Chair of the Finance Committee, Council Member Brannan, and Speaker Adrienne Adams for your continued support of PPGNY's work to provide health care to all New Yorkers in need.

PPGNY is a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, we conducted over 74,000 patient visits through our virtual health center and at our NYC health centers, providing care to all regardless of immigration status, identity, or ability to pay for services. We engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people. Our Project Street Beat program (PSB), through their offices and Mobile Health Center, conducted 270 patient visits with individuals at high risk of HIV exposure. And in 2024, we helped enroll over 4,300 individuals in health insurance programs.

At PPGNY, we are deeply committed to providing care, no matter what. Over the years, we have weathered the many attempts to severely restrict sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion care. This includes anti-abortion groups' weaponization of the federal court system to ban access to medication abortion care and launch a baseless suit aimed at defunding Planned Parenthood. We've also experienced the effects of harmful policies from anti-abortion state governments aimed at criminalizing providers in New York offering abortion care. Additionally, hostile elected representatives throughout the country continue to vigorously attack the transgender and gender non-conforming communities and the lifesaving care they depend on. We expect the attacks to continue under the second Trump term; he and his administration have signaled their desire to defund our operations.

In the two months that the Trump-Vance administration has been in office, we have already seen the devastating impact their policies have had on young people and this country's education system as we know it. The administration has recently taken steps to dismantle the Department of Education, potentially leaving millions of young people, but especially low-income students and students with disabilities, without critical resources and civil rights protections they depend on. They have also enacted a series of harmful executive orders that target LGBTQAI+ youth which includes blocking gender affirming care for young people under 19 and withholding federal funds from schools that promote an inclusive environment for transgender and gender

nonconforming youth.¹ Additionally, the administration may again force providers out of the Title X program, one of the only federally funded programs for sexual and reproductive health. The program supports access to family planning resources and preventative care for young people and prioritizes their ability to access resources confidentially. We anticipate programs that support young people, and their families will continuously be dismantled. Despite these attacks, we stand ready to provide care for all in need of our services.

Expanding Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Young People

PPGNY is deeply committed to youth empowerment and ensuring that all our patients can secure the health care and education they need and deserve. Supporting young people during this critical time in our country is vital. The decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and other attacks on sexual and reproductive health care access could potentially impact young people throughout our city. Additionally, we are seeing the impact of legislative efforts aiming to restrict gender affirming health care for LGBTQ+ youth by conservative state governments. **Today, we respectfully request funding from the Speaker's initiative to support our Education and Training (E&T) team, which includes our Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program and youth serving programs.**

In 2024, the E&T engaged over 10,450 individuals through our programs at schools and in the community. Our E&T team collaborates with stakeholders across NYC to provide evidence-informed and evidence-based workshops for young people. These workshops are provided by both our adult sexuality educators and our YHP's. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about their rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care to overcome barriers and stigma that teens may experience when accessing care. In 2024, our YHP program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York City. We also provide professional development to youth-serving adults on sexual reproductive health topics to support their capacity in engaging young people at their community-based organizations and in schools.

Our E&T team is unique because we provide a holistic approach with our programs supporting youth and the adults who work with them daily. We ensure that we provide credible peer messaging to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people throughout New York City. The programs leverage social media to promote health care access in fun and

¹ *Background on trump executive order attacking LGBTQ+ students, their...* HRC. (n.d.).
<https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/background-on-trump-executive-order-attacking-lgbtq-students-their-educators-and-the-freedom-for-all-children-to-learn>

interactive ways. In 2024, the NowUKnow Instagram reached over 1,000 young people and promoted opportunities for youth to participate in sexual & reproductive health rights & access workshops at schools and in the community. Funding from the City Council will allow PPGNY to expand our youth engagement work to ensure more young people have access to the care they need.

Though New York State law requires students receive one semester of comprehensive health education by a certified health instructor in both middle school and high school, there are no meaningful enforcement measures to ensure sexuality education is taught in New York City schools or that it is comprehensive, and as such, students' experiences vary widely. The YHP program can help address gaps in access to comprehensive sexual health education for young people.

This funding will also support our Signature Programs which further connect youth in middle school, high school, and college to critical sexual and reproductive health services and resources. Through the Signature Programs, highly trained health educators facilitate workshops for young people throughout New York City to raise awareness of PPGNY's broad range of services and help young people make informed health care decisions. Health educators collaborate with YHPs to develop social media content and outreach strategies to educate and raise awareness about health and reproductive justice related issues.

Ensuring Access to Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Services

With the ever-changing national landscape and continued attempts to restrict access to care, New York is seen as a haven for critical health care services. We ask the council to continue to fund PPGNY through the Reproductive and Sexual and Health Initiative to allow us to continue to provide sexual and reproductive health care services and educational programs throughout New York City.

PPGNY requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the initiative to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers. Longstanding under-investment in reproductive health care on the state level, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, the havoc wreaked by the COVID pandemic, and care restrictions nationally have contributed to budget shortfall that has forced PPGNY to limit some of our services. In fact, over the past year, we have closed four of our health centers, including our Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. We reduced our staff and were forced to end our deep sedation care at our Manhattan health center, impacting our ability to provide abortion care later in pregnancy.

Funding from this initiative helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of our NYC health centers. We provide care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns.

This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, this funding will support our YHP program. As mentioned, the YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care.

We also request \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to support our health care operations and address the financial difficulties we are experiencing.

Conclusion

PPGNY continues to be committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers, no matter their background, get the care they need. It is important that the Council support services and programs to that focus on our most vulnerable populations. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure healthcare access to all.

Thank you.

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Michelle Bosch, and I am a volunteer at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

I grew up and went to college in the Midwest before moving to NYC; Planned Parenthood was extremely important to me because it was the only place I could go for healthcare in my Midwest town that was either free or had a sliding scale for the care that I needed. I didn't have money or insurance; I was treated with kindness, no judgements, and questions were listened to and heard with follow-up and education on my health. Then, after moving to NYC, Planned Parenthood was there for me with the same kindness, care, and thoughtfulness as I began my career and struggled to get insurance. I can't imagine Planned Parenthood not existing for people similar to me who have nowhere else to go to receive the quality healthcare that we need and deserve to keep us healthy and safe.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health

care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

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**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Pariza Bhuiya, and I am a Youth Health Promoter (YHP) at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs—including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

I'm a senior at Eleanor Roosevelt High School. When I joined the Youth Health Promoters program at Planned Parenthood, I did so with the intention of helping others. I thought of advocacy as something abstract—essential but distant. However, not long after, I learned my mother had stage 4 endometriosis. Suddenly, the topics I was learning and teaching didn't just exist when I came into the program. They were my mother's reality. They were the years of pain she had endured in silence, the doctors who had dismissed her, and the way she had to suffer without complaint as if that were the natural order of things. And so, I found myself caught between two worlds—one where knowledge is freely given, where people speak of reproductive health as something worth protecting—and the other, where my mother didn't know what was happening to her own body because no one told her, where she had suffered simply because no one had ever said, "this is not normal." I often wondered: if she had known sooner, would it have changed anything? Knowledge is essential, and I have seen the effect when it isn't accessible. No one should have to sit in a waiting room, helpless, watching someone they love to suffer without understanding why. Through PPGNY, I have been allowed to speak—to tell my mother's story, educate others, and ensure that no one else has to suffer cluelessly.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers

rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city. I have seen, firsthand, the positive impact the YHP program has had on my peers and me. The program allows us confidently discuss health care topics with our friends so they can lead a healthy lifestyle and make informed decisions. Because many young people do not attend schools that offer a comprehensive sexuality education program, the YHP program is vital in filling a critical knowledge gap.

Research has consistently shown that comprehensive sexual health education works. Positive youth development education, that focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality is crucial in helping young people to make health-promoting decisions and can help shift broader cultural ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. During a time when

the federal government has increased its efforts to curb access to comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexuality education and focus on abstinence only, “risk avoidance” education and health care, it is important that the Council invests in organizations that work to ensure young people have access to sexuality education to promote positive youth development education, healthy relationships and communication, that is crucial in helping young people to make healthy life decisions.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

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**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Tasmin Ali, and I am a Youth Health Promoter (YHP) at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

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I attend Bard High School Early College Manhattan, and I am a senior. During my four years of high school, there were a total of 18 health class sessions. Although the title Health class would suggest some foundational learning on the human body, only **two** of those eighteen classes were focused on reproductive health. Finally, to put some meaning to these painstaking statistics: As I started my position as a youth health promoter, obliviousness wasn't an embarrassment. I wasn't made to feel embarrassed that I didn't know the multitude of birth control options, every day was a lesson of opportunity and a seed of knowledge. Whether it was sitting in on lessons during the summer training from staff at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York, or asking the YHP Coordinator Mia a question that she was always happy to answer. As a Muslim and South Asian individual, it was undoubtedly nerve-wracking to work at a place that was highly stigmatized in my community, yet it is the most well-rounded experience of my life so far. I was able to tear up those stigmas and educate those in my community about the misconceptions of Planned Parenthood, and also the reproductive education that was essential to being a teenager.

To be able to share this information back to the community was the richest opportunity of all working as a youth health promoter. Whether it was seeing lightbulbs brighten up with difficult questions hands shooting up with a perfect answer, or hands raised halfway to questions that were always a start to a beautiful conversation. All of these reactions signified that these people were reminded of an important right of their lives, the ability to know what is going on in their bodies. In short, working at PPGNY as a Youth health promoter is a job that lets me learn and give back - a blessing I'm always grateful for.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

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Research has consistently shown that comprehensive sexual health education works. Positive youth development education, that focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality is crucial in helping young people to make health-promoting decisions and can help shift broader cultural ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. During a time when the federal government has increased its efforts to curb access to comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexuality education and focus on abstinence only, “risk avoidance” education and health care, it is important that the Council invests in organizations that work to ensure young people have access to sexuality education to promote positive youth development education, healthy relationships and communication, that is crucial in helping young people to make healthy life decisions.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers depend on care offered at PPGNY and we look to the Council to continue to support our ability to do so.

We are deeply grateful to the Council for its enduring support, especially during difficult times like these.

**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 13th, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Tenzin Tsepel, and I am a Youth Health Promoter at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I want to thank the Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Rita Joseph, and the committee members for the chance to discuss how PPGNY's programs and services have benefited me and many New Yorkers.

For over 100 years, PPGNY has been a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY conducted over 74,000 sexual and reproductive health care patient visits via telehealth and at their New York City Health Centers. PPGNY also engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people in schools and in the community.

I am here today to urge the Council to support critical investments in PPGNY, especially our well regarded and incredibly important education programs, to ensure we can continue to provide the care and support over 7,000 New Yorkers depend on.

Up until I became a YHP, my understanding of sexual and reproductive health was limited to a brief, week-long curriculum in my health class about HIV and AIDS. SRH was something I never really thought about, especially when there weren't any conversations about it either in school or at home. I wasn't uncomfortable with the idea of talking about my body, but I grew up in an environment where these conversations were considered TMI (or private) and inappropriate to discuss openly. This left me feeling disconnected from my own body and unsure of how to take care of it. This feeling is not unique to me, as many of my peers are also growing up without the proper education to understand their bodies and health. However, Planned Parenthood provided me a space to have these necessary conversations on topics of sexual health, STI's, reproductive rights, and justice without the judgement or shame. This kind of support and education should be accessible to all, just like the health services necessary to ensure the safety and well being for everyone. It matters to me because my role as a YHP enables me to be a role model in my community, sharing crucial resources to help others feel in control of their health, and overall to be a guide that I would have appreciated when I was younger.

This year, PPGNY is asking for an increase in funding that allows them to continue to provide healthcare to any New Yorker who may need it. Despite their commitment, PPGNY has been forced to make painful decisions to ensure they can provide the care and support New Yorkers rely on. Longstanding under-investment by state elected leaders in reproductive health care, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, and the residual effects of the COVID pandemic, have contributed to the financial difficulties PPGNY is experiencing.

Despite the rising costs of rendering abortion care, funding – including Medicaid and private insurance reimbursement rates – has remained largely stagnant. The ever-widening gap between reimbursement and expenses – which amounts to tens of millions of budgetary deficits for PPGNY every year – threatens the sustainability of local programs and puts reproductive health care access at risk. In the last year, PPGNY has closed four health centers, including the Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. It is certain that PPGNY will be faced with even harder decisions in the year ahead given the threats posed by this new federal administration. With that in mind, these needs have greatly expanded, so that PPGNY may sustain itself in the long term.

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative as well as \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,500 New Yorkers.

Funding from these initiatives helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of their NYC health centers. PPGNY provides care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, and notable for this committee, this funding will support education programs like the PPGNY's Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city. I have seen, firsthand, the positive impact the YHP program has had on my peers and me. The program allows us confidently discuss health care topics with our friends so they can lead a healthy lifestyle and make informed decisions. Because many young people do not attend schools that offer a comprehensive sexuality education program, the YHP program is vital in filling a critical knowledge gap.

Research has consistently shown that comprehensive sexual health education works. Positive youth development education, that focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality is crucial in helping young people to make health-promoting decisions and can help shift broader cultural ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. During a time when the federal government has increased its efforts to curb access to comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexuality education and focus on abstinence only, "risk avoidance" education and health care, it is important that the Council invests in organizations that work to

ensure young people have access to sexuality education to promote positive youth development education, healthy relationships and communication, that is crucial in helping young people to make healthy life decisions.

Investments like these in sexual and reproductive health care and support are more critical than ever. In the two months since the Trump-Vance administration has been in the White House, we have already experienced harmful rhetoric and policies that may impede providers ability to provide care. A series of executive orders include rolling back Biden-era abortion protections, blocking access to gender affirming care for transgender and gender nonconforming communities, increased ICE enforcement, and temporarily freezing federal grants for a multitude of programs Americans depend on. These attacks are especially harmful as many providers are still dealing with harm caused by the first Trump presidency. We expect the attacks to continue and look to our elected leaders to support our ability to provide care for all New Yorkers.

New Yorkers depend on care offered at PPGNY and we look to the Council to continue to support our ability to do so.

We are deeply grateful to the Council for its enduring support, especially during difficult times like these.

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Testimony to Committee on Education

*From Trenton Price – Executive Director, Salvadori Center
Thursday, March 13, 2025*

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee. My name is Trenton Price, and I am the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center. I am a former middle school teacher, school leader, and district leader for arts education in the New York City Public Schools before joining Salvadori.

At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services – that is STEM plus the A for Arts, and in our case, Architecture – to schools, after-school sites, and NYCHA community centers across the five boroughs focusing on the built environment. For context, last year, Salvadori taught over 12,000 students in 145 schools and NYCHA community centers. Our goal is to make STEM and the arts come alive for students, and to foster the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving – just like real-life architects, designers, and engineers.

We are grateful to have the support of the Council through multiple CASA and Digital Inclusion & Literacy grants as well as After School Enrichment and the Speaker's Initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the City.

I want to thank this Committee, Chair Joseph, and the Council for their commitment to ensuring schools are funded adequately and equitably. All too often, we see schools that serve students with compounding needs without adequate resources to provide a robust and well-rounded education. From our project-based learning work, we know that well-planned lessons that have students creating their understanding through real-world applications require time and resources. For example, our

programs require significant materials for students to really bring the built environment to life for students. I and Salvadori underscore the importance of funding for schools, especially arts and creative education. As we say, it starts with the arts! We thank you for advocating for full and robust funding for schools and creative education city-wide, as we know these are important levers for student achievement as well as career pathways here in New York City.

One way to increase these opportunities for young people is to increase CASA and Digital Inclusion and Literacy funding, which have remained flat for several years. This investment in our youth will create pathways and vital opportunities for learning outside the school hours.

I thank you for facilitating this hearing and for your commitment to supporting the young people in our City. We are grateful to be able to serve New York City's children, and we hope to support the work of hands-on, project-based STEAM learning for years to come. Thank you.



**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Education
Council Member Rita C. Joseph, Chair**

**Written Testimony submitted by
Debra Sue Lorenzen, Director of Youth and Education
March 13, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing. My name is Debra Sue Lorenzen. I am the Director of Youth and Education for St. Nicks Alliance in North Brooklyn, including Community School Districts 13, 14, 16 and 23. St. Nicks Alliance serves more than 10,000 youth and their families through comprehensive youth and education services for ages 2-24 years old. Among our NYCPS-funded education services are an early childhood center, Learning to Work, and three community schools.

I want to begin by thanking City Council and Chair Joseph for your deep commitment to public education and youth services. The most important investment today's grown ups can make in New York City's future is in our youngest residents. Yet, the Mayor's budget underfunds or cuts program after program designed to bolster children's learning. St. Nicks Alliance implores City Council to demand a budget that cares for our city's children.

We are requesting these crucial education programs are restored, baselined and expanded:

- Restore \$197 million in budget cuts to 3-K and Pre-K early childhood education programs to preserve access for families;
- Baseline funding to education programs, including:
 - \$14 million for Community Schools;
 - \$31 million for Learning to Work programs;
 - \$5 million for Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students;
 - \$4 million High-impact tutoring
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth.

Restore \$197 million to 3-K and Pre-K early childhood education programs to preserve access for families.

Small World Early Childhood Center has more than 410 FY26 applications for 136 slots. While the need is clearly great for affordable childcare, community-based providers like St. Nicks Alliance are struggling to meet that need. The most significant challenge is **hiring and retaining staff because of low salaries** at CBO programs that are not on par with NYCPS staff doing the

same work. Recent DC37 Local 205 negotiations with the City of New York had shameful results, with baseline rates of \$18/hour, \$20 per diems for summer (not per hour, per day) and longevity bonuses of \$200 for decades of service. As a result of these low wages, providers struggle to attract and retain qualified staff. Other issues include **delayed contract reimbursements** which create serious cash flow problems. In addition, the **lack of flexibility in converting slots** between Schoolday/school year and Extended Day/Extended Year prevent cbo's from being as responsive as they need to their communities. These issues must be resolved in order for NYC's childcare care system to be strong enough to prevent New Yorkers with young children from fleeing our city.

In FY25, the City made one-time investments to stabilize the early childhood education system and improve accessibility for families that were not restored in the Mayor's FY26 Preliminary Budget. New York City's next budget must include \$197 million towards creating a high-quality, free, equitable, and universal child care system that meets the needs of all children and families and includes strong supports for workers and providers. Including:

- **\$112 million** for 3-K programs, which includes \$20 million to support families that did not receive 3-K offers in 2024 and \$92 million to maintain general 3-K funding;
- **\$55 million** for additional special education Pre-K classes;
- **\$25 million** to convert schoolday/school Year seats to extended day/extended year seats, giving working families longer hours of child care coverage; and
- **\$5 million** for family outreach support to ensure continuity of services across New York City.

Invest in Community Schools

St. Nicks Alliance operates three community schools (PS150, MS126 and Williamsburg High School for Art and Technology. Whether guiding a Pre-Kindergartener entering school, a 5th or 8th grader transitioning into their next school, or a 12th grade graduating high school, the community school model ensures children are better prepared. Community schools serve the whole child through powerful partnerships between St. Nicks Alliance and our school partners to deliver wrap around services—and the model works. Our schools have increased their attendance and graduation rates because of academic supports and restorative justice, laundry rooms and food pantries, mental health and vision care—for examples.

An investment of \$14 million is needed to restore one-year City funding, which would ensure continuity and maintain comprehensive services in FY26. Despite baselining the majority of expiring Community School funding in the FY25 budget, \$14 million was only funded for one year. The City's Community Schools Initiative should be fully baselined using a sustainable funding source to fill in the gaps left by temporary American Rescue Plan dollars.

Restore Mental Health Continuum (\$5 Million) and High-Impact Tutoring (\$4 Million)

St. Nicks Alliance has developed its School Success Model in partnership with Community School District 14 to help children, especially those most struggling, to strengthen the literacy skills and behavioral health needed to thrive in school. In addition to Community School Model, NYSPS has other programs under threat that should be restored and expanded to allow more children to benefit from crucial mental health and academic interventions. Mental Health Continuum (\$5 Million) currently offers **mental health interventions** to students at 50 schools

in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn and should be expanded. In addition, **High-Impact Tutoring** enables students get the individualized support they need in reading and math.

Invest in Learning to Work

St. Nicks Alliance operates Learning to Work (LTW) at Bushwick Community High School since LTW's launch. We supports students in this transfer school as they overcome major obstacles to earn their high school diploma, workforce readiness through paid internships, and college and career planning. Our LTW program is one of 66 citywide, including 46 Transfer Schools and 20 Young Adult Borough Centers.

Although funding for LTW programs was restored in the FY26 Preliminary Budget, there was no funding secured for the out years. UNH urges the City to **baseline LTW's full \$31 million budget through sustainable funding sources.**

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

St. Nicks Alliance operates three Summer Rising programs for roughly 300 Middle School Youth. Despite having completed four years of Summer Rising, the City has still released no data on its efficacy and has not conducted a formal evaluation of the model. On the ground, middle schoolers tell us—with words and low attendance—that the model doesn't meet their developmental needs or their interests. **The City should use a portion of already dedicated summer funding to pilot alternative summer programming models for middle school students.** The alternative(s) should break from the traditional school schedule, and allow far more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities.

Thank you for your consideration of St.Nicks Alliance's recommendations and for your continued commitment to NYC children and families.

Submitted By:

Katherine Konop MS-RDN Candidate

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Teachers College, Columbia University

525 W 120th St, New York, NY 10027

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March 11, 2025

Attention: Committee on Health at the New York City Council

Dear Lynn Schulman, Julie Menin, Carmen De La Rosa, Kristy Marmorato, Oswald Feliz, James F. Gennaro, Joann Ariola, Susan Zhuang, Mercedes Narcisse & others whom this may concern,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Katherine Konop and I am currently a Graduate Student enrolled at *Teachers College, Columbia University*. In addition to being a full-time student, majoring in Nutrition and Public Health, I also Co-Chair the Emerging Leader's group for *No Kid Hungry* (a *Share Our Strength* campaign) and I sit on the Junior Board for *The Campaign Against Hunger*. If it is not obvious by my life choices and titles, I care profoundly about ensuring vulnerable communities have access to nourishing and healthy foods.

The *Food is Medicine* movement is not just a fad to me, but rather a mantra for how I live my life and a legacy I want to be a part of. Because I am a firm believer in this ideology, I am also exceptionally devoted to ensuring equitable access to healthy and nourishing food. I believe that health should be a right—not a privilege. As someone who suffers from an autoimmune disease, I understand firsthand how critical nutrition is in managing long-term health outcomes. This personal experience, combined with my academic background, drives my passion for advocating for comprehensive and sustainable food systems and the programs that support them.

I am deeply concerned about the state of food insecurity in our country and the disproportionate impact it has on our most vulnerable populations, particularly children. Currently, **19% of children who reside in New York City live with food insecurity** (No Kid Hungry, 2025). Some may argue that this number seems low, especially when juxtaposed to more severe national statistics, yet this data suggests that approximately **one in five children go hungry** in one of the world's largest metropolitan cities (No Kid Hungry, 2025). This statistic is not only alarming but also unacceptable, considering the wealth and resources available in our area and with the upcoming projected budget cuts to programs like SNAP, I fear these numbers will only intensify.



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The work I do, and the work I have done, has always had a strong emphasis on ensuring the best health outcomes for our future, which, to me, means prioritizing the health and well-being of our youth. We know that nutrition plays an essential role in children's growth, academic success, and overall development (Alves et al., 2024). Without consistent access to nutritious meals, children are not only deprived of the fuel they need to thrive physically and psychologically, but they are also deprived of the opportunity to reach their full potential in school, which consequently impacts their careers, earning potential, and ultimately their lives (and their future children's lives!) Can you see how this may play a role in continuing systemic injustices and inequalities?

If we hope to make substantial strides in combating food insecurity, we should first address the most food insecure season – Summer. I urge you all to invest more resources into programs like ***Summer Rising***, ***Summer EBT***, and similar community-based food access initiatives. To many families these programs serve as lifelines that offer consistent, nutritious meals that are not always guaranteed when school is out of session.

The saying goes, “if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” By ensuring that these summer meal programs are paired with educational experiences focused on nutrition/food preparation, we are investing in our children's success and longevity. This is a step we must take if we are to create a healthier, more equitable future for all.

I hope you will join me in advocating for policies that will support and expand food access programs, ensuring that children, especially those from food insecure families in vulnerable communities, have year-round access to healthy meals and educational opportunities that empower them to make informed food choices.

Together I believe we can make a substantial difference in our community, and I thank you for your time and consideration. I very much look forward to the opportunity to discuss this critical issue further and I would absolutely welcome any prospect to work together.

Sincerely,
Katherine E. Konop

*Teachers College, Columbia University Graduate Student, Nutrition and Public Health
Co-Chair, Emerging Leaders Group, No Kid Hungry
Junior Board Member, The Campaign Against Hunger*



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March 14, 2025

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/13/25

Testimony submitted by:

Katherine Soll

CEO, Teens for Food Justice

kfsoll@teensforfoodjustice.org

Chair Joseph, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service.*

My name is Katherine Soll. I am the CEO and Co-Founder of Teens for Food Justice (TFFJ).

TFFJ is building a food-secure future through school-based, youth-led hydroponic farming, providing local, sustainably-grown produce to food desert communities, and fostering health, education, and opportunity equity. We train students in Title I middle and high schools to maintain indoor hydroponic farms through hands-on education in STEM, health, and culinary curricula during the school day, as well as food justice and nutrition-focused afterschool programming.

TFFJ is a proud member of the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy's Food Ed Coalition, collaborating with community-based organizations to ensure that every NYC public school student has access to high-quality food and nutrition education. Through this partnership, we work with schools, educators, and policymakers to expand nutrition education, advocate for food justice policies, and empower NYC students—especially those in under-resourced communities—to make informed, healthy choices that will shape their futures.

As a member of the Food Ed Coalition and recipient of the Food Education grant, we strongly support the Food Ed Coalition's policy recommendations to enhance food education and nutrition security across NYC schools by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing Food Ed programs & partner supports. We have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of comprehensive food education on students' health, academic engagement, and leadership skills.

Expanding funding for food education programs is crucial to extend these benefits to a greater number of students across New York City. Therefore, we recommend the council:

- continue to support the Food Ed Hub and its work enhancing collaboration among food education providers and expanding nutrition education for NYC's vulnerable communities, including students.



- increase funding for food education programs, as only 190 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support, and additional resources will allow more students to benefit
- establish a Speaker's Initiative to facilitate targeted funding for 100 CBOs, enabling them to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula, ultimately ensuring access to high-quality nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable students

We also urge the council to improve NYC nutrition security by strengthening the understanding of key food initiatives and ensuring the development of inclusive and transparent standards for Food Ed.

- It is essential to develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS. Additionally, CBOs should be compensated for their expertise in co-creating standards, and professional development resources for teachers and schools.

We implore the council to expand food access and summer nutrition opportunities.

At TFFJ, our year-round hydroponic farming operations have highlighted the unique challenges that summer poses for food security. Food insecurity does not pause when the school year ends. In New York City, only about 36 out of every 100 eligible children participate in summer meal programs. We therefore recommend:

- Expanding support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support programs will enhance food access and education for students when school is out, ensuring they receive nutritious meals and hands-on food experiences. To maximize the program's effectiveness, it is crucial to incorporate a meal period before dismissal, particularly for those from food-insecure families who rely on summer meals as their primary source of nutrition.
- Increasing funding for free Health Bucks would further expand access to fresh food for families by simplifying the application process and allowing community-based organizations (CBOs) to partner with schools more effectively. This funding would address the high demand seen in 2024, where numerous applications for Health Bucks went unfunded, thereby ensuring local CBOs can better serve their communities.

Thank you in advance for your attention to and interest in these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Katherine Forman Soll

Katherine Soll
CEO/President

FOOD ED HUB

NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Overview:

Access to healthy, nourishing foods is critical to leveling health inequities as hunger and diet-related diseases continue to disproportionately challenge low-income families and communities of color in NYC. To address this challenge, the Food Ed Coalition has identified actions the City Council must take to ensure stronger, safer, and healthier communities. The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members convened by the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The City Council must support these initiatives in budgeting:

Strengthen NYC Food Ed

- Fund the Food Ed Hub & Coalition
- Enhance Food Ed Programs & Partners Support

Improve NYC Nutrition Security

- Understand Food Initiatives, Promote Youth Leadership, Review Food Worker Titles & Capacity
- Develop Inclusive & Transparent Food Ed Standards

Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition

- Support Summer Rising & Summer Meal with Food Ed Programming
- Increase Health Bucks Funding

Sustain the Food Ed Hub and Coalition

- Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (\$250,000).
- Develop a strategic framework with the assistance of an outside consultant to support the coalition's long-term growth. This framework will align with the goals of Food Ed Community Based Organizations (CBOs) while advancing NYC's broader objectives of supporting low-income New Yorkers facing food and housing insecurity. The plan will reduce reliance on NYC City Council funding and focus on improving nutrition security, especially for students in NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) (\$100,000).

Enhance Support for Food Ed Programs & Partners

- Increase funding for Food Ed programming in NYCPS. Food Ed is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

Currently, only 190 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will expand programming to 100 more schools, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators (\$3 million).

- Establish a Speaker's Initiative to strengthen Food Ed organizations serving NYCPS through targeted funding and capacity-building support. This initiative will provide 100 established CBOs with \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. Unlike other project-based funding, these grants would reduce administrative burdens on smaller organizations while supporting the hiring of qualified staff, purchase essential equipment, and develop new curricula. Investing in a diverse range of organizations will enhance culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities, ensuring more students have access to these critical programs (\$2.5 million).
- Invest in program evaluation to provide CBOs with a tool to measure the effectiveness and impact of Food Ed programming in NYCPS and their communities. A standardized evaluation method will help assess program value, identify areas for improvement, and ensure continued growth and effectiveness (\$100,000).



FOOD ED HUB

NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Strengthen Understanding of Food Initiatives & Investments

- Amplify community voices in assessing and improving NYCPS food initiatives (e.g. Plant-powered Fridays) to strengthen food and nutrition security. The Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute will partner with CBOs and families to evaluate NYCPS food programs, ensuring diverse voices shape impact assessments and address gaps in how these initiatives serve residents. CUNY will expand its Food Justice Fellowship, which trains undergraduates to advocate for community-based food initiatives and pairs them with internships at food justice organizations. We will prioritize students nominated by City Council Members and internship sites in their districts. (\$499,878).
- Request the Comptroller's Office to conduct a comprehensive review of NYC food service roles and titles, assessing career pathways, wages, staffing capacity, and professional development opportunities for managers and kitchen staff.

Ensure Transparency & Inclusivity in Food Ed Standards

- Develop culturally responsive, research-based Food Ed standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million).
- Compensate CBOs for their expertise in co-creating food education standards and developing professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).
- Include CBOs in training development to ensure culturally relevant, community driven approaches to Food Ed.

Strengthen Food Access Programs in Schools & Communities

- Expand support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Programs by integrating Food Ed programming. These programs provide students with nutritious meals and hands-on food education when school is out. To maximize impact, require that a meal period is included before dismissal or that students eat first, followed by a structured learning activity. These changes will help ensure that students—especially those from food-insecure families where summer meals may be their only nutritious meal—have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.
- Increase funding for free Health Bucks to expand access to fresh, healthy food for families. This additional funding would supplement—not replace—existing programs run by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). In 2024, the DOHMH received 600 applications for Health Bucks but could not fully fund all requests, leaving many local CBOs underfunded or without funding altogether. Increased funding will:
 - Enable Food Ed CBOs to partner with schools in every council district.
 - Simplify the application process for CBOs.
 - Improve access to affordable, nutritious food for families with children.

A hungry child can't think.

A well-nourished child thinks, learns, and thrives!

"[Food and nutrition education is] important because students will pay the cost for an unhealthy diet and lifestyle in the future."

-NYC Public Schools educator, PD Session 01/29/2024



LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION
TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Testimony of the Family Homelessness Coalition

The New York City Council Committee on Education

Oversight – The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029, and The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report

March 13, 2025

The Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC) is made up of more than 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children’s advocacy organizations and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

We would like to thank Chair Joseph and members of the committee for the opportunity to deliver testimony on this topic.

Introduction

New York City’s homeless population has more than doubled since 2022, including the number of children experiencing homelessness. Almost one in three of New York’s homeless population are children. The worsening family homelessness crisis disrupts both children’s education and the schools themselves. It remains critical that the City prioritize continuity for children’s schooling and that shelter policies promote educational stability. This humanitarian emergency is also coming at a time when federal support to fight homelessness is under threat. It is more important than ever that this year’s adopted budget urgently address the crisis in family homelessness with resources.

The current landscape impacts both people experiencing homelessness and the organizations that work to help them, including the Steering Committee members of the Family Homelessness Coalition. Our organizations are directly impacted by real and proposed federal funding cuts to their programs. In addition to additional resources, we call for greatly increased efforts to expedite owed payments to homeless and social service providers. This is a problem that has gone on for far too long and is now an existential threat to providers.

FHC strongly urges the following priorities in the upcoming budget.

Improving Education Continuity

Stop the Implementation of Shelter Stay Limits for New Arrival Families with Children.

With the pace of new arrivals slowing and a frightening federal landscape potentially on the horizon for immigrant families in New York City, we oppose the threat of eviction and re-placements for families with children in shelter. The City should eliminate the requirement that families with children in grades K-6 be forced to move shelters after their initial 60-day placement and should eliminate any shelter moves for families with children in school, no matter the grade level.

Increase the Percent of Families DHS Places or Re-Places in Shelter in the Same Borough as Where their Children Attend School.

In the most recent Mayor's Management Report (MMR), there was small progress made in increasing the number of families DHS placed in shelter in the same borough as the family's youngest school-age child. But almost 40% of families in shelter continue to be placed in a different borough from where their youngest child goes to school¹. Further progress should be made in this area through more deliberate policy, such as integrating conversations into the intake and Independent Living Plan processes about the possible availability of a shelter transfer closer to children's schools and helping parents pursue education-related shelter transfers when desired by parents.

Implement the Recommendations of the Students in Temporary Housing Transportation

Taskforce. This task force created through Local Law 158 developed a set of recommendations² that the city should promptly implement to ensure school stability and regular attendance for students in temporary housing.

Make Permanent the Policy of Automatic Offers for 3K and Pre-K seats for Children in

Shelter and Make Other Efforts to Increase Percent. The percent of age-eligible children in shelter who participated in Pre-K was around 50% in the most recent publicly stated numbers, a 10-percentage point decrease from pre-Covid numbers. The City should make greater efforts to connect age-eligible children in shelter to Pre-K and 3-K by continuing to make automatic offers for 3-K and Pre-K to families in shelter who did not participate in the application process and ensure that 3-K and Pre-K outreach efforts include a targeted approach to increasing access to and participation in early childhood programs for children in shelter (e.g., personalized outreach calls, shelter-based staff talking to all parents of age-eligible children about whether they want to enroll in 3-K and Pre-K, designating a point person to troubleshoot early childhood enrollment issues).

On behalf of FHC, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

¹ [dhs.pdf](#)

² [\[FINAL DRAFT\] Transportation Task Force Subgroup Template FOR Finance, Labor, and Legal Review](#)

Testimony for the New York City Council

March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Christina Dietz, and I am the school psychologist at The Guild for Exceptional Children's 4410 Preschool Special Education program in Brooklyn.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget allocated 55 million dollars to help sustain essential special education services for our preschoolers with autism and other disabilities. This \$55 million allocated for preschool special education will **expire** in June unless **extended in the 2026 budget**.

We are already struggling to meet the needs of our students with limited resources at our 4410 school. Teachers in our programs are **paid significantly less** than those in the NYC Department of Education, which only exacerbates our staffing challenges. If funding is not extended, we risk teacher resignations, classroom closures, and thousands of preschool children with disabilities losing access to their legal right to special education services in our Brooklyn community.

I strongly urge the City Council and Mayor Adams to extend this funding and ensure these critical services continue. Our educators and children depend on your leadership to prevent this crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

Christina Dietz, M.A., N.C.S.P.

School Psychologist
The Carrie Mastronardi Early Childhood Education Center
The Guild for Exceptional Children
1273 57th St Bklyn, NY 11219
Phone 718-435-2554 Ext 250

**Testimony
for
The New York City Council**

3/13/25

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jolene Gunther-Doherty, and I am the Director of The Guild for Exceptional Children's 4410 Preschool Special Education program.

I am here today to talk about the importance of finding funding to support 4410 preschool special education.

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include: \$55 Million for preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities.

The failure to act to save this preschool special education funding will result in many preschool special education teachers and teacher assistants resigning. There is the potential for hundreds of 4410 classrooms being closed across the city. The impact on preschool students with disabilities and their families would be devastating, causing thousands of preschool children who have a legal federal right to special education services to sit at home waiting for a preschool special education seat.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

TESTIMONY

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

Oversight:
Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

March 13, 2025

Prepared by:

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Introduction

The Legal Aid Society welcomes the opportunity to testify and thanks Chairperson Joseph and the Committee on Education for their leadership on the effects of the 2026 budget on New York City Public School students.

Like many New Yorkers, the Legal Aid Society is concerned about the consequences of decreased funding for public education and the implications of those cuts on our clients. We are deeply opposed to any cuts to our public education system, but in particular we urge the Mayor and the City Council to maintain funding for Early Childhood Education (\$192 million); funding for Restorative Justice Programs (\$21 million); programs for Literacy and Dyslexia (\$7 million); and baseline funding for the Mental Health Continuum (\$5 million).

The Legal Aid Society is the nation's largest and oldest provider of legal services to low-income families and individuals. Throughout our 149-year history, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. The Legal Aid Society is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. From offices in all five boroughs, the Society annually provides legal assistance to low-income families and individuals in nearly 200,000 legal matters each year, including education advocacy for school-age children and youth. We seek to be a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected -regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. Our practice encompasses three practice areas: the Criminal Defense Practice, the Civil Practice and the Juvenile Rights Practice.

The Criminal Defense Practice is the premier public defender program in the country, handling 125,000 criminal matters in a typical year. Our victories in and out of the courtroom protect the constitutional rights of our clients and strive for greater humanity in the criminal legal system. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court

are school-age teenagers and young adults who need and are legally entitled to receive educational services and many of them are young parents with children who also require educational services.

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

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

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

Our perspective comes from our daily contacts with children, youths, and their families as well as our frequent interactions with courts, social service providers, and NYC agencies, including the 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 Education Advocacy Project and Education Law Project of The Legal Aid Society submit the instant testimony as we are generally concerned about the consequences of decreased funding for public education and the impact on our clients. Our written testimony will focus on the consequences of funding cuts in the areas of: Early Childhood Education (pre-k and 3k as well as preschool special education); Funding for Restorative Justice Coordinators & Training for School Staff; Programs for Literacy and Dyslexia; and the Mental Health Continuum.

I. Early Childhood Education (Pre-K, 3K, Promise NYC and Pre-school Special Education)

In 2022 Mayor Adams' office released a report entitled *Accessible, Equitable, High-quality, Affordable: A Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education in New York City*, highlighting and recognizing the importance of child care and early childhood education to the vitality and economic success of the city.¹ Despite this acknowledgement of the importance of early education to New York City families, Mayor Adams seeks to decrease funding for child care and early childhood education programs by approximately \$300 million in his preliminary budget for 2026.

We are concerned about the possible consequences of decreased funding for early childcare and pre-kindergarten education programs throughout the city. Mayor Adams' proposed budget cuts would result in exacerbating the already existing shortages in special education preschool classes, a reduction in the city's 3-K program, and would deny early learning opportunities to undocumented students which are now provided through Promise NYC.

¹ *Accessible, Equitable, High-quality, Affordable: A Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education in New York City*, OFFICE OF THE MAYOR (2022) at 10. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/office-of-the-mayor/2022/Childcare-Plan.pdf>

A. High Costs of Early Care and Education

The cost of childcare and education continues to increase in the cost-of-living crisis. According to a report published in January 2025 by New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, the annual cost for private preschool center-based care across the five boroughs was approximately \$26,000 in 2024.² This represents a 43% increase since 2019, and according to the Comptroller's report using federal affordability benchmarks, a New York City family would need to earn \$334,000 to afford the cost of care for a toddler.³ The increase in costs for a family trying to access home day care is even more extreme with the cost of home-based day care for a toddler increasing 79% during the same period of time.⁴

Without government programming, parents will be unable to afford regulated childcare. Inadequate support could lead to an increase in neglect by forcing working parents to leave children unattended or in dangerous situations in order to work and provide basic necessities such as rent and food. In some cases, this may mean that parents will reduce their hours of formal employment, terminate employment, or move out of New York City. A September 2024 report by Robin Hood Foundation found that due to problems accessing or affording reliable child care, 29% of New York City mothers reported losing or changing jobs, 34% chose part time work over full time work or declined a promotion, and 29% reported not looking for a job.⁵

² *Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision*, Jan. 15, 2025, Office of New York City Comptroller. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/child-care-affordability-and-the-benefits-of-universal-provision/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Spotlight on: Child Care-Related Work Disruption in the Early Childhood Poverty Tracker*, Robin Hood Foundation, September, 2024. https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/ECPT_Poverty-Tracker_Childcare-Distrutions.pdf

This can result in an increase of families living in poverty in the city, and a decrease to city tax revenue.

B. Disparate Access to Early Care and Education

The access to early childcare and education also disparately affects members of marginalized groups, such as low-income families, families of color, and people of lower formal educational attainment. A 2023 American Educational Research Association (AERA) study found that Black, Hispanic, and Asian children were 10% less likely to enroll in pre-kindergarten than White students.⁶ The Promise NYC program helped address some of the disparities by expanding early childhood education to families who did not have access to federally funded programs but without restoration of the \$25M cut from their budget, many thousands of New York City families will be denied equitable access to child care and early childhood education. Without city funding to increase access to quality early childcare and education, existing educational gaps will continue generationally.

C. Pre-school Students with Disabilities

New York has underfunded pre-school special education for many years. While the city provided funding to make up for expiring federal Covid funds in FY 2025, those funds have been insufficient to fully meet the city's legal obligation to provide an appropriate education to thousands of preschool aged New Yorkers with disabilities. According to DOE reporting, in SY 2023-24, 40% of New York City preschool students with disabilities were NOT fully served (in an appropriate classroom and receiving all related services).⁷ At the end of the 2023-2024 school year 2,172 preschool aged students with disabilities (6.8%) were still awaiting an appropriate

⁶ Meghan McCormick, et al., *Going the Distance: Disparities in Pre-K Enrollment in Higher-Quality Schools by Geographic Proximity, Race/Ethnicity, Family Income, and Home Language*, 9 AERA OPEN January-December 2023 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584231168867>

⁷ New York City Schools Annual Preschool Special Education Report for SY 2023-24, Nov. 1, 2024, p. 31. <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/annual-special-education-data-report---preschool---2023-24-10-26-2024.pdf>

school placement.⁸ Another 420 students were “partially placed,” meaning that while they had a school, they were not placed in a program that fully complied with the requirements of their individualized education plans.⁹ A commitment of \$55 million dollars by the city would maintain (but not expand) access to special education pre-school classrooms for New York City families. While this funding was provided as one year funds, those funds will expire in June 2025, unless the City Council takes action.

D. Pre-K and 3K Programs

It is imperative that New York city fund 3-K and Pre-K programs at a level high enough to provide access to all eligible New York City children. These programs provide high-quality early learning opportunities and we ask that the City Council ensure that these opportunities continue by maintaining funding (\$112M of which is scheduled to expire in June) at their current levels.

E. Impact of Early Care and Education Funding

Decreased funding of early education and child care programs has both short and long term financial consequences for the city. Decreased access to childcare for parents has immediate negative economic externalities. Parents forgo \$30-35 billion in income because the high price of early childhood care and education necessitates that they reduce their hours of paid work or leave the paid labor force altogether to care for their children.¹⁰ These decreased wages result in a loss in tax revenue of roughly \$4.2 billion annually.¹¹

In the long term, funding early care and education sets New York City children up for success later in their school careers. Research has determined that early childhood education

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at 32.

¹⁰ Elise Gould and Hunter Blair, *Who’s Paying Now? The Explicit and Implicit Costs of the Current Early Care and Education System*, ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE (January 15, 2020). <https://shorturl.at/ahqVW>

¹¹ *Id.*

correlates with significant effects on test scores, language development, and motor skills at kindergarten entry.¹² Students who participate in early childhood education experience better attendance, fewer behavioral problems, and increased chances of reading at grade level by the fourth grade.¹³ For students with disabilities, early intervention with special education programs can help improve health outcomes, language skills, and cognitive, social, and emotional development.¹⁴ All this results in better outcomes for youth, and an educated citizenry for the city, with young people able to contribute to the economic and political life of the city.

A substantive investment in early childcare and education more than pays for itself in the long run. We therefore urge the City Council to restore the proposed cuts to early childcare and education.

II. Mental Health Supports and the Mental Health Continuum

A. Mental Health Crisis for NYC Youth

New York faces an enduring youth mental health crisis that pre-dated, and was exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of children and youth struggling with severe mental health needs has risen sharply while wait times before accessing treatment have remained lengthy—taking weeks, months, or even a year or more. The consequences of untreated mental health challenges in children and adolescents are long term and profound: they correlate with poor academic achievement, teenage pregnancy, unstable employment, substance use, behavioral challenges, and poor medical outcomes. As one of the most devastating

¹² William T. Gormley Jr., et al., *Promoting School Readiness in Oklahoma: An Evaluation of Tulsa's Pre-K Program*, 40 J. HUM. RES. 533 (2005).

¹³ Gary T. Henry, et al., *Early Education Policy Alternatives: Comparing Quality and Outcomes of Head Start and State Prekindergarten*, 28 EDUC. EVALUATION & POL'Y ANALYSIS 77 (2006); William T. Gormley Jr., et al., *Social-Emotional Effects of Early Childhood Education Programs in Tulsa*, 82 CHILD DEV. 2095 (2011)

¹⁴ *The Importance of Early Intervention in Education*, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PERMIAN BASIN <https://shorturl.at/yBT39> ; Matthew L Romo, et al., *Early intervention and Special Education in New York City: Patterns of Service Use and Disparities Affecting Children of Colour*, 49 CHILD CARE HEALTH DEV. 119 <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.13024>

consequences of untreated mental health conditions, suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth between 10 and 24 years old.¹⁵

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention warns of “an accelerating mental health crisis among adolescents with more than 4 in 10 teens reported they feel ‘persistently sad or hopeless,’ and 1 in 5 saying they have contemplated suicide.”¹⁶ The revelations of this survey follow those of the American Academy of Pediatrics, who in October of 2021 declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health.¹⁷ The declaration stated its members were “caring for young people with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families and their communities.”¹⁸ The December 2021 Advisory on Youth Mental Health issued by General Vivek H. Murthy, the U.S. Surgeon General, echoed much of the same alarm, outlining the pandemic's influence as well as the pre-pandemic mental health challenges.¹⁹

The consequences are disproportionately harmful for our clients at The Legal Aid Society who are low-income and come predominantly from underserved communities. We frequently see children and youth who are unable to get help and treatment until there is a significant crisis that places them or their families in the city’s court system, an expensive and often traumatizing system that is ill equipped to address the mental health needs of our children. Our young people end up receiving care in emergency rooms, hospitals, foster care, and juvenile justice facilities

¹⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics, School-Based Mental Health: Pediatric Mental Health Series, <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/mental-health-minute/school-based-mental-health/>

¹⁶ Moriah Balingit, ‘A cry for help’: CDC warns of a steep decline in teen mental health, THE WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 31, 2022, 1:00 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/31/student-mental-health-decline-cdc/>.

¹⁷ Pediatricians, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists and Children’s Hospitals Declare National Emergency in Children’s Mental Health, AM. ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY (October 19, 2021), https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/zLatest_News/Pediatricians_CAPs_Childrens_Hospitals_Declare_National_Emergency_Childrens_Mental_Health.aspx.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ U.S. Surgeon General, Protecting Youth Mental Health (2021), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>.

rather than through delivery of continual, high-quality outpatient mental health services needed to be and remain healthy. Far too many of our schools are inadequately resourced and unnecessarily routing our children experiencing mental health crises to Emergency Medical Services (EMS), suspending students from school, and invoking law enforcement on student behavior.

B. School-Based Solutions to Address the Mental Health Crisis

Schools can play a pivotal role in connecting young people with mental health challenges with the services they urgently need. Studies have shown that children and youth are much more likely to seek behavioral and mental health support when these services are accessible in school. School-based mental health services can help reduce racial disparities in access to care. These services are associated with increased attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed investment in school-based mental health clinics and the City Council's proposed investment in peer-to-peer programs to improve youth mental health outcomes provide important opportunities to support New York students. However, many schools need a continuum of school-based behavioral and mental health services ranging from school-wide prevention efforts for all students to individualized, intensive intervention, including expedited access to clinically trained social workers for students with more significant needs, and psychiatrists, where necessary and desired by the family.

The City has such a model in 50 high-needs school, reaching more than 21,000 students in 3K to 12th grade in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn comprised of 95 percent students of color, more than 30 percent students with disabilities, more than 14 percent English Language Learners, and mostly students in poverty.²⁰ This innovative model, called the [Mental Health Continuum](#), is the first ever cross-agency partnership between NYC Public Schools (NYCPS),

²⁰ This demographic data for the Mental Health Continuum is based on 2022-23 enrollment since 2023-24 counts are not yet public.

NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H), and NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to help students struggling with mental health challenges receive expanded, appropriate, and timely care.

This initiative has been recommended by over 200 organizations, the City Council, and the City Comptroller and highlighted in the [Mayor's Mental Health Plan](#), the [Council's Mental Health Road Map](#), and [NYC Speaks Action Plan](#). The funding for this initiative began in FY 2022 with an initial \$5 million investment. However, its success depends on future sustainability. We ask that the City Council and the Mayor renew and baseline \$5 million to continue the Mental Health Continuum's work.

III. Restorative Justice

A. Restorative Justice is Critical to Foster Safe Communities.

Both the CDC and Surgeon General highlight the potential for schools to be a protective factor in the mental health crisis, finding that teens who feel connected at school report much lower rates of poor mental health. Given the potential of school engagement to provide children with stability and access to services, as well as the need to foster safe, supportive learning communities, the use of research-based restorative practices must be maintained and expanded. Exclusionary school discipline harms children, especially for those communities which are disproportionately impacted including Black, Latine, students with disabilities and low-income students.

A report issued in 2023 by the U.S. Surgeon General encouraged the strengthening of relationships and the adoption of evidence-based practices within schools as a protective factor to guard against the negative effects of isolation, loneliness and disconnection for young

people.²¹ The acknowledged link between social and emotional well-being and traditional academic success metrics is growing. The CDC points out that “school connectedness (i.e. the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about them as individuals) has been shown to have positive effects on traditional academic achievement, including having higher grades and test scores, having better school attendance, and staying in school longer.”²²

The exclusion represented by suspension is antithetical to these recommendations. This emphasis on connection and interconnectedness is at the heart of Restorative Practices and other relational building evidence-based practices and mirrors the imperative outlined by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the CDC and the U.S. Surgeon General.²³ Prioritizing the mental health of students can no longer be an afterthought, but rather must be at the forefront of education—as the social emotional well-being of students is intrinsically linked to academic outcome.²⁴

B. Educational Experts Agree that Exclusionary School Discipline Harms Children

The New York State Board of Regents has “reaffirmed its commitment to “reducing dependence on exclusionary school discipline.”²⁵ Most experts agree that restorative justice practices build and heal relationships, teach positive behaviors, and hold students accountable for

²¹U.S. Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (2023)

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-a-larm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>. “Schools can deliberately foster connectedness in a number of ways ... such steps can help all students - and not just the most vulnerable - do better.” See also Moriah Balingit, ‘A cry for help’: CDC warns of a steep decline in teen mental health, THE WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 31, 2022, 1:00 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/31/student-mental-health-decline-cdc/>.

²² CDC, Youth Connectedness Is an Important Protective Factor for Health and Well-being (last visited April 14, 2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/youth-connectedness-important-protective-factor-for-health-well-being.htm>.

²³ Restorative Practices are often used to encompass many different types of programming. Simply, Restorative Practices may include formal and informal processes designed to build relationships, a sense of community and consequently prevent conflict and wrongdoing. See: The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education, Fostering Responsibility, Healing and Hope in Schools, Evans, Katherine and Vaandering, Dorothy; Good Books, New York, 2016

²⁴ New York State Education Dep’t., Social Emotional Learning: A Guide to Systematic Whole School Implementation, <https://p1232.nysed.gov/sss/documents/GuideToSystemicWholeSchoolImplementationFINAL.pdf>

²⁵ Appeal of N.V.D. Decision No., 17,985 (April 2021) citing The University of the State of NY Ed. Dep’t Resolution, Jan. 2019.

their actions.²⁶ The implementation of Restorative Practices and other similar pro-social programs is aligned with the Social Emotional benchmarks articulated by New York State; the suggested social emotional learning benchmarks encourage growth through practice and reflection and do not expect growth via exclusion.²⁷

We highlight the recommendations offered in the report by the NYS Safe Schools Task Force. We embrace the words of the New York State Commissioner of Education: “Punitive and exclusionary discipline rarely helps students understand how their inappropriate behaviors can have real world consequences. Learning and success are not solely academic in nature; they are dependent upon the social-emotional support that school districts are required to provide. All students must have equitable access to interventions that will support their holistic academic and social-emotional development as learners and developing, contributing members of society. Rather than immediately turning to punishment, districts should instead consider how they can help students learn to assume and accept responsibility for their behavior while simultaneously establishing remedial supports to foster, and thus augment, their emotional intelligence.”²⁸

C. Restorative Justice is a Cost Effective Strategy

Restorative Justice and Practices have been woven through NYC Public Schools’ Citywide Behavioral Expectations to Support Student Learning.²⁹ Despite the recognized

²⁶ See U.S. Comm’n on Civ. Rts, Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color and Disabilities, (July 2019) [Beyond Suspensions: Examining School Discipline Policies and Connections to the School-to-Prison Pipeline for Students of Color with Disabilities | U.S. Commission on Civil Rights \(usccr.gov\)](https://www.usccr.gov/publications/beyond-suspensions-examining-school-discipline-policies-and-connections-to-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-for-students-of-color-with-disabilities/)

²⁷ Casel, Restorative Practices and SEL Alignment, https://schoolguide.casel.org/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/2020.12.11_Aligning-SEL-and-RP_Final.pdf; Casel, Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools, https://drc.casel.org/uploads/sites/3/2019/03/Restorative-Practices_-_Fostering-Healthy-Relationships-Promoting-Positive-Discipline-in-Schools.pdf; New York State Education Dep’t., New York State Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks (August 2018), <https://p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NYSSELBenchmarks.pdf>.

²⁸ Rosa, Betty, An equitable approach to student discipline (April 24, 2023) <https://www.nyssba.org/news/2023/04/21/on-board-online-april-24-2023/an-equitable-approach-to-student-discipline/>

²⁹ [Citywide Behavioral Expectations \(nyc.gov\)](https://www.nyc.gov/site/behavioral-expectations)

efficacy of restorative justice approach, the NYCPS continues its overreliance on exclusionary school discipline.

In 2018, the NYC Comptroller's office wrote that "[r]estorative practices, an alternative to exclusionary discipline, emphasize empathy, personal responsibility, and restoring community in the conflict resolution process. Examples from around the nation show that the approach has been highly effective in improving school climate and reducing suspensions. But transitioning to restorative practices requires investment in school-based consulting on implementation and capacity-building, and centralized program supports and evaluation."³⁰

The cost of exclusionary school discipline cannot be measured solely in terms of the harm to children's education and mental health, great though those harms may be. Full, citywide implementation of restorative justice does require an investment in training and staffing, but exclusionary school discipline is not free either. Increased incidents in schools result in higher levels of police activity in each school. Each of the city's 500 high school employs one or more Deans, who spend time and energy investigating incidents and acting as prosecutors in school suspension hearings. New York City runs suspension hearing offices in all five boroughs. Each of them employs a Suspension Director, a supervising attorney, and a plethora of Suspension Hearing Officers, Early Resolution Counselors, and clerical staff. In addition, New York City runs about 22 Alternate Learning Centers, where students attend while they are suspended from their home schools. Each requires space, administrative staff, certified teachers and related professionals. In FY 2024, \$21M was approved for restorative justice programs.

When budgets were cut due to a loss of federal Covid dollars in FY 2025 the city provided \$12M in city collars to help ameliorate that loss, and to maintain the NYCPS restorative justice program, those funds are not included in the preliminary budget and will

³⁰ [Safe and Supportive Schools: A Plan to Improve School Climate and Safety in NYC : Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander](#)

expire in June 2025 if no action is taken. We therefore ask that the City Council restore funding for NYCPS' restorative justice program at the FY 2024 level of \$21 million.

IV. Literacy and Programming for Students with Dyslexia

It is the basic function of our educational system to teach children how to read. However, according to the results of the New York State reading exams administered in 2019, less than 50% of all third to eighth graders were proficient in reading. Just 36 percent of Black and Latine students in those same grades were proficient in reading. Only 16% of students with disabilities were proficient in reading. Learning loss caused by the Covid pandemic has only contributed to the decline in literacy among New York City's public school students.

Nationally, it is estimated that one in five children have dyslexia.³¹ This startling statistic means that in New York City alone, it is estimated that 200,000 children have dyslexia, but many have not yet been diagnosed. The reality is that getting diagnosed with dyslexia and receiving intervention to target dyslexia requires financial resources and advocacy. Families often have to get independent evaluations that cost thousands of dollars. Targeted reading intervention can cost hundreds of dollars per hour. Retaining private special education attorneys is an additional exorbitant cost.

For those of us who work at The Legal Aid Society's Education Advocacy Project and Education Law Project, low literacy and inadequate resources translates into clients who are woefully behind in reading. Our clients are often teenagers who are stuck at the 1st or 2nd grade reading level and who therefore have disengaged from school. Perhaps their disengagement has contributed to a child protective case being called against their family due to excessive school absences. Perhaps their disengagement has led to activity leading to a delinquency case. Our

³¹ Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, "What is Dyslexia?", 2022, available at <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/dyslexia/what-is-dyslexia/>, citing Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia*, 2nd edition, pp.143- 24.

advocacy can result in obtaining non-public school placements or compensatory education in the form of individualized tutoring for our clients. But these are costly solutions to problems that would be better addressed much earlier in a student's education trajectory.

Along with the education advocacy community, we cheered when Mayor Adams made dyslexia screening a hallmark of his education agenda when he took office. In May of 2022, he and Chancellor Banks announced that the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) would screen students for dyslexia beginning in September of 2023. Teachers would receive training on how to provide targeted, evidence-based reading intervention for students. Phonics based reading would be brought back into the curriculum. The New York City public school system has also since opened four new specialized dyslexia programs at schools in Harlem, the South Bronx, and Park Slope and Sunset Park in Brooklyn. However, the creation of four programs serving children grades K-2 is not enough to address the needs of New York City students.

The cost of having an illiterate populace makes itself felt in a multitude of ways, including lost educational and economic opportunities. A citizen who cannot read and write will not be able to participate in government, pursue higher education, or even participate in most vocational programs. They may be unable to fill out a job application or obtain employment, leading to a greater incidence of poverty, and may be more likely to get caught up in legal systems that impose a cost on our criminal legal system. According to recent DOE reporting, the average reading level of New York City children in juvenile detention is at the 5th percentile,³² meaning that young people who are not taught how to read are more likely to engage in activities that bring them into contact with the juvenile legal system. That continues into the adult penal system. Of young people on Rikers Island between the ages of 18-21 approximately 20% are

³² *Educational Programming for New York City Juvenile Delinquents, Juvenile Offenders, and Adolescent Offenders, Local Law 21 of 2024*, January 31, 2025, New York City Public Schools Report. <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/local-law-21-d79---sy2324-update.pdf>

reading at high school reading level³³ and 80% require academic interventions to bring them up to a functional reading level. Once in the school to prison pipeline, these youth require targeted and evidence based interventions to push them out of the pipeline and to give them access to opportunities that only exist through education.

We urge you to maintain and expand funding for literacy programs for New York City students in every school and at every level, including in the New York City Public Schools that serve children in juvenile detention and New York City jails. Because the city's efforts up until now have primarily focused only on students grades K - 2, we ask that the Education committee pay particular attention to the creation of programs for students in 3rd through 12th grade. Many of these students missed out on evidence based reading instruction and science of reading and require access to high quality literacy programs in order to develop the skills they need to manage adult life, to work and live independently. The creation and support of specialized reading programs is both the right thing for New York City students and also prevents the need for costly solutions on the backend.

Conclusion

The time is now for New York City to emphasize systems of school support. By ensuring that every child has access to effective early childhood education and 3K programs, dyslexia screenings and evidence-based reading interventions, sustainable and consistent mental health supports, evidence-based literacy programs, and restorative justice intended to build social-emotional competencies for young people, we maintain safe communities and keep students in classrooms - learning.

³³ Rikers Island Education Report: Educational Programming for Adolescents and Young Adults at Rikers Island – Local Law 168 of 2017, December 1, 2022, Available at [local-law-168-d79---4-13-23.pdf \(windows.net\)](https://www.local-law-168-d79---4-13-23.pdf)

Many thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Creating Healthy Communities
Through the Power of Cooking

**Testimony for the
New York City Council Committee on Education in support of Food and Nutrition Education
March 13, 2025**

My name is Barbara Glassman and I am writing as the Executive Director of The Sylvia Center. Thank you to Council Member Rita Joseph, Chair, and all the members of the Education Committee for convening this hearing. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony to advocate on behalf of critical food and nutrition education for our students.

Founded in 2007 to address diet-related diseases, The Sylvia Center educates young people and their families through culinary programming to promote health and well-being. The Sylvia Center's programming serves students in all five NYC boroughs representing 29 NYC council districts. We help young people take control of their health through better food choices and encourage them to be healthy food advocates.

We urge the council to strengthen food education in NYC by funding programs that serve all NYC students. Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 190 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently have programs, and additional resources will benefit many more students (\$3 million). To support the expansion of high-quality nutrition education for NYC students with the least access to food education and nutritious food options, we are requesting the establishment of a Speaker's Initiative that will create targeted funding for 100 community-based organizations, of which The Sylvia Center is one, to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula (\$2.5 million). Additionally, we are requesting funds (\$100,000) to invest in consistent evaluation methods so that we can demonstrate to the community and NYC Council the impact that ongoing food education programs have on our city's students.

We are advocating for this funding as a member of the Food Ed Hub, a diverse group of over 300 organizations, school leaders, advocates, and others based at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College. The Coalition works together to ensure that all NYC students have quality food and nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food. The Food Ed Hub advocates for policies that support healthy school food and food education, convenes stakeholders, develops organizational capacity, undertakes independent research on key school food issues, and provides resources and professional development opportunities for educators. We urge you to fund our group so that we can continue this crucial work in partnership with other providers and educators citywide (\$250,000).

As one of our school-based partners said about our students, "The take away from The Sylvia Center programs is that they get to learn about nutrition, to become more knowledgeable about health and wellness, as well as trying new ingredients and dishes that they normally would not have tried. It makes me happy to hear that they would definitely try these new recipes at home with their family." Thank you for being our partner in this important work.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Glassman
Executive Director

Testimony for NYC City Council Education Committee Hearing

Natalie Greaves-Peters, PhD, RDN

Postdoctoral Senior Research Associate, Tisch Food Center

Teachers College, Columbia University

Thank you, Chair Joseph, members of the Education Committee, and Council Member Abreu, for your time and thoughtful consideration of food and nutrition education today. Your leadership in shaping policies that impact NYC students is deeply appreciated.

My name is Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters, and I am a researcher at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Throughout today's testimonies, you've heard how food education transforms schools and communities. I see this first hand in my work at the Tisch Food Center, where we collaborate with schools and organizations to ensure that every student—regardless of zip code—has access to high-quality nutrition education and food security. To truly meet the needs of NYC students, we must invest in both.

That's why I urge the Council to renew funding for the Food Ed Hub with a **\$250,000 investment**—not just to expand food education, but to strengthen food security in our schools and communities.

This funding will allow us to:

- **Advance research** on best practices in food education and ensure effective implementation.
- **Develop culturally responsive, evidence-based food education standards** to guide schools and community-based organizations.
- **Compensate community-based organizations** for their expertise in co-creating programs that directly serve students and families.

In addition to renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub, I also urge the Council to support key initiatives that strengthen food education and security across NYC. One critical investment is

\$499,878 to expand the Food Justice Leadership Fellowship, which trains diverse CUNY undergraduates to advance community-driven voice and leadership.

Right now, too many NYC students lack access to both quality food education and reliable, nutritious meals. Without continued investment, we risk losing momentum and leaving thousands of students without the support they need to thrive.

The students who spoke today are proof that this investment changes lives. Investing in the Food Ed Hub ensures that every dollar reaches classrooms, strengthens community partnerships, and creates lasting impact. I urge the Council to fund the Food Ed Hub request and the additional initiatives—because food education and food security go hand in hand, and no student should be left behind.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

FOOD ED HUB

**NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE**

Overview:

Access to healthy, nourishing foods is critical to leveling health inequities as hunger and diet-related diseases continue to disproportionately challenge low-income families and communities of color in NYC. To address this challenge, the Food Ed Coalition has identified actions the City Council must take to ensure stronger, safer, and healthier communities. The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of over 300 food and nutrition education advocates, program leaders, and school community members convened by the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The City Council must support these initiatives in budgeting:

Strengthen NYC Food Ed

- Fund the Food Ed Hub & Coalition
- Enhance Food Ed Programs & Partners Support

Improve NYC Nutrition Security

- Understand Food Initiatives, Promote Youth Leadership, Review Food Worker Titles & Capacity
- Develop Inclusive & Transparent Food Ed Standards

Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition

- Support Summer Rising & Summer Meal with Food Ed Programming
- Increase Health Bucks Funding

Sustain the Food Ed Hub and Coalition

- Renew funding for the Food Ed Hub to strengthen collaboration among food education providers and advocate for policies that expand access to nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities. Sustaining this vital network will ensure more students—especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent families—receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives (\$250,000).
- Develop a strategic framework with the assistance of an outside consultant to support the coalition's long-term growth. This framework will align with the goals of Food Ed Community Based Organizations (CBOs) while advancing NYC's broader objectives of supporting low-income New Yorkers facing food and housing insecurity. The plan will reduce reliance on NYC City Council funding and focus on improving nutrition security, especially for students in NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) (\$100,000).

Enhance Support for Food Ed Programs & Partners

- Increase funding for Food Ed programming in NYCPS. Food Ed is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. Healthy students perform better across all academic measures, including behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes (CDC).

Currently, only 190 of the ~1800 NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants. Additional funding will expand programming to 100 more schools, benefiting students and their communities while providing professional development opportunities for educators (\$3 million).

- Establish a Speaker's Initiative to strengthen Food Ed organizations serving NYCPS through targeted funding and capacity-building support. This initiative will provide 100 established CBOs with \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. Unlike other project-based funding, these grants would reduce administrative burdens on smaller organizations while supporting the hiring of qualified staff, purchase essential equipment, and develop new curricula. Investing in a diverse range of organizations will enhance culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable communities, ensuring more students have access to these critical programs (\$2.5 million).
- Invest in program evaluation to provide CBOs with a tool to measure the effectiveness and impact of Food Ed programming in NYCPS and their communities. A standardized evaluation method will help assess program value, identify areas for improvement, and ensure continued growth and effectiveness (\$100,000).



**LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY**
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION
TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Questions or comments? Contact:

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FOOD ED HUB

**NOURISH NYC'S CHILDREN:
FIGHT HUNGER & BUILD HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH FOOD & NUTRITION SUPPORT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE**

Strengthen Understanding of Food Initiatives & Investments

- Amplify community voices in assessing and improving NYCPS food initiatives (e.g. Plant-powered Fridays) to strengthen food and nutrition security. The Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute will partner with CBOs and families to evaluate NYCPS food programs, ensuring diverse voices shape impact assessments and address gaps in how these initiatives serve residents. CUNY will expand its Food Justice Fellowship, which trains undergraduates to advocate for community-based food initiatives and pairs them with internships at food justice organizations. We will prioritize students nominated by City Council Members and internship sites in their districts. (\$499,878).
- Request the Comptroller's Office to conduct a comprehensive review of NYC food service roles and titles, assessing career pathways, wages, staffing capacity, and professional development opportunities for managers and kitchen staff.

Ensure Transparency & Inclusivity in Food Ed Standards

- Develop culturally responsive, research-based Food Ed standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million).
- Compensate CBOs for their expertise in co-creating food education standards and developing professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).
- Include CBOs in training development to ensure culturally relevant, community driven approaches to Food Ed.

Strengthen Food Access Programs in Schools & Communities

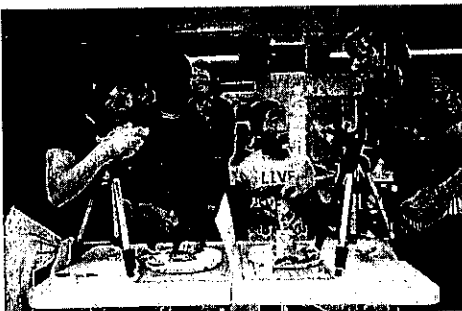
- Expand support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Programs by integrating Food Ed programming. These programs provide students with nutritious meals and hands-on food education when school is out. To maximize impact, require that a meal period is included before dismissal or that students eat first, followed by a structured learning activity. These changes will help ensure that students—especially those from food-insecure families where summer meals may be their only nutritious meal—have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.
- Increase funding for free Health Bucks to expand access to fresh, healthy food for families. This additional funding would supplement—not replace—existing programs run by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). In 2024, the DOHMH received 600 applications for Health Bucks but could not fully fund all requests, leaving many local CBOs underfunded or without funding altogether. Increased funding will:
 - Enable Food Ed CBOs to partner with schools in every council district.
 - Simplify the application process for CBOs.
 - Improve access to affordable, nutritious food for families with children.

A hungry child can't think.

A well-nourished child thinks, learns, and thrives!

"[Food and nutrition education is] important because students will pay the cost for an unhealthy diet and lifestyle in the future."

-NYC Public Schools educator, PD Session 01/29/2024



**LAURIE M. TISCH CENTER FOR
FOOD, EDUCATION & POLICY**
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TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

**New York City Council Committee on Education
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair**

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

March 13, 2025

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

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates over \$185 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

UJA submits the following recommendations for the FY 2026 budget.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Preschool Special Education

The FY 2025 New York City enacted budget included significant investments to continue essential education programs and services that were at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, providing long-term funding, other programs were continued for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless policymakers act to extend funding in the FY 2026 budget.

One of the programs that was funded for one year was preschool special education classes. In FY 2025 these classes received \$55 million in funding that allowed additional classrooms and seats to be created. For years, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has struggled to provide an appropriate special education preschool seat to every child who required one. At the end of January 2025, NYCPS reported 450 kids were waiting to access preschool special education programs. Any decrease in funding to preschool special education programs will result in further damage to a system that is already struggling to meet the needs of students with disabilities in a timely manner. **UJA requests the Administration and Councilmembers baseline \$55 million for special needs preschools in the Executive Budget to sustain funding for existing programs.**

Pre-K and 3-K programs

In FY 2025, one year funding of \$112 million was directed to 3-K programs and \$25 million was included to provide extended day and year seats to children in 3-K and Pre-K programs. An additional \$5 million was added to increase outreach to families across New York City who are eligible for the 3-K and Pre-K program. Similar to the preschool special education funding mentioned above, this funding will expire at the end of June if the Administration and Councilmembers do not choose to fund these programs in FY 2026.

Child care for children under five is a significant cost for families in New York City. A 2023 report conducted by Citizens' Committee for Children found that 80% of the families surveyed had difficulty affording child care.¹ Any reduction in funding for early childhood education programs will result in children losing access to programs and families ultimately needing to figure out how to pay for these vital programs. Free, high quality early childhood education programs like Pre-K and 3-K provide an invaluable resource to families struggling to make ends meet in New York City. Most importantly, they strive to ensure every child has access to educational programs that will prepare them for kindergarten. Reduced access to free early childhood education opportunities will drive families out of New York City and potentially harm educational outcomes for future generations. **UJA urges the Administration and Councilmembers to baseline \$112 million for 3-K programs, \$25 million for extended day and year seats in 3-K and Pre-K programs and \$5 million for education and outreach to families to ensure families in New York City have continued access to early childhood education programs.**

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

No City contracted 3-K and Pre-K programs at CBOs should have to wait months to be compensated for completed work. UJA urges the Administration to address the payment issues facing the 3-K and Pre-K systems by:

- **Paying early care and education service providers on time and complete payments owed immediately.**
- **Fully staff NYCPS divisions responsible for invoicing and payment and make permanent the ability of ECE providers to batch multiple months of invoices.**

Enrollment procedures create additional issues for families and providers. Currently, families enroll their children in 3-K and Pre-K programs located in CBOs through NYCPS. NYCPS enrolling families in CBO 3-K and Pre-K programs creates another unnecessary step in the enrollment process that families would not have to deal with if they could enroll through the CBOs. It also results in CBOs obtaining their list of enrollees from NYCPS meaning they ultimately have control over who is or is not attending CBO programs. CBOs interact directly with families who are interested in attending their 3-K and Pre-K programs and should be given the option to directly enroll them in their programs.

Lack of comprehensive pay parity across the early childhood education workforce continues to plague the sector as well. The 2019 salary parity agreement eventually resulted in all certified CBO teachers in pre-kindergarten programs receiving the same compensation as entry level NYCPS pre-kindergarten teachers. Not

¹ <https://cccnyc.org/data-publications/from-birth-to-age-12-child-care-and-out-of-school-care/>

included in this agreement were longevity increases which resulted in teachers who worked in CBO Pre-K programs for multiple years making the same amount as a teacher who is a new hire. Directors and educational directors in CBO Pre-K programs were also not included in the 2019 salary parity agreement. As a result, many are compensated less than the teachers they supervise, resulting in directors and educational directors leaving CBOs for higher paying jobs. Additionally, non-teaching staff in CBOs, including assistants, janitors, cooks, and other staff, are being compensated less than their counterparts in New York City Public Schools.

In 2024, labor contract agreements were made between Local 95 (HeadStart providers) and Local 205 (nonprofit child care centers that contract with NYCPS). Local 215 members and those who are not unionized were not included in these contract agreements. All of the 3-K and Pre-K programs in UJA's network of nonprofits are either members of Local 215 or not unionized. This means these providers are operating on different contract agreements than what was agreed upon for Local 95 and Local 205. These contract agreements are not perfect however Local 205's agreement in particular includes salary increases, longevity payments and retention bonuses, a minimum pay rate of \$18 an hour, funds towards health insurance costs, and additional pay for employees who work in extended day and year programs. All of these are issues that previous labor agreements did not address. Meanwhile the CBOs who are not unionized or are in Local 215 and were not included in the 2024 contract agreement are offering their staff smaller salaries and less benefits due to continuing to work off an outdated salary agreement.

To combat this, UJA urges the City to immediately fund an early childhood education labor contract agreement for staff not covered by the Local 95 and Local 205 agreements. This would include Local 215 and non-unionized CBOs. At a minimum the agreement must match what Local 205 agreed upon in order to allow Local 215 members to receive the same benefits and compensation as their counterparts. Ideally, the agreement would result in equivalent salaries and benefits for equal levels of education and experience between certified and uncertified early childhood educators inside and outside NYCPS programs. This should also account for the differences in school days and longer hours worked by CBO educators as well as include longevity increases. A minimum wage floor of \$25 an hour must also be included for non-teaching staff in CBOs. Lastly, when contracts agreements are achieved, they must be promptly amended to include additional funds for CBOs to have the financial means to compensate their workforce according to those agreements.

UJA's nonprofit partners entered contracts with NYCPS, agreeing to be funded by the City to provide high-quality early childhood education programs to the communities they serve. These nonprofits have kept up their end of that agreement and need the City to address the previously stated issues to maintain a thriving early childhood education system in New York City.

NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

The Adams' Administration recognized this and changed Local Law 2's student enrollment threshold from 300 to 150 students, making more nonpublic schools eligible to be reimbursed for school security guards through New York City funds. UJA is thankful to the Adams' Administration for changing Local Law 2 and their continued commitment to making sure all children are educated in a safe environment.

Health and Wellness Services for Nonpublic Schools

Section 912 of the NYS Education Law requires school districts to provide nonpublic school students the same health and wellness services provided to public school students. However, we know that there is a wide range

of services NYC Public Schools offer in their schools including access to social workers, counselors, and other mental health services. These same services are not offered to many private school students due to their inability to fund similar supports.

Several programs championed by the City Council focused on the health and mental health needs of the children of New York City and we applaud the Administration's focus on meeting the needs of school-aged children. These initiatives include increasing support for peer mental health programs in schools. The pandemic had a significant adverse psychological impact on many vulnerable students and educators continue to report behavioral concerns years after students returned to the classroom. Nonpublic and public schools now face a new reality: a mental health crisis affecting their students. As the City continues to meet the evolving needs of children and we continue to strive to meet school-aged children's needs and challenges, the Administration must ensure that the health and safety of the non-public school community is not left behind and that all schools are provided expanded supports for mental health. **UJA urges the City to provide services to nonpublic schools in parity to the public school community, including peer mental health support and other subsidized supports.**

ADULT LITERACY

There are currently over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers can access ESOL, adult basic education (ABE), or GED classes in any given year.

Moreover, while the need for adult education classes has only grown over the past two years, in FY 2025 the Adams' administration cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding was maintained in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY 2026.

The overwhelming majority of the 2.2 million New Yorkers in need of adult literacy classes are poor and working-class immigrants, women, and people of color; these vulnerable populations are expected to be impacted by federal budget cuts. The loss of federal funding would eliminate seats for well over 20,000 students.

According to January's Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, there were over 18,000 adults served in DYCD-funded adult literacy programs in FY 2024. Yet the \$12 million in funding for FY 2025 and the proposed \$12 million in funding for FY 2026 is slated to serve only 9,118 students, just half the number of those served in FY 2024. Fortunately, this year, the Council restored the Administration's cuts to services through its FY 2025 discretionary funding. But discretionary funding is never guaranteed, and it shouldn't be incumbent upon the Council to subsidize funding cuts made by the Administration.

Given the Mayor's cuts in FY25, and given the risk of further cuts or restrictions on federal funding for adult education that could impact the availability of services to New Yorkers, UJA-Federation calls on the Administration and Council to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to communities who use the programs.

Adult literacy education provides individuals with greater opportunities, furthers equity, and advances educational justice. For these reasons, UJA urges the Administration and the Council to consider the proposed recommendations.

CONCLUSION

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



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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Education
Council Member Rita C. Joseph, Chair**

**Submitted by Paula Inhargue
March 13, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life at 770 locations. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses have been community hubs for education for decades, and continue to provide New York City's communities with guidance around academic instruction and enrichment, as well as navigating the Department of Education (DOE) at large. They have also served as sites for DOE programming, and as mediators between communities and the DOE to ensure that schools remain as responsive to the needs of their local communities. Many also contract with the DOE to provide early childhood education in New York City, serving an estimated 12,000 children under the age of 5.

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

- Restore \$197 million in budget cuts to 3-K and Pre-K early childhood education programs to preserve access for families;
- Continue the path toward universal child care in New York City by funding 2 Care to create child care for 2-year olds, starting with a \$25.7 million investment to serve 1,000 children.
- Restore funding to education programs, including:
 - \$3.3 million for Student Success Centers;
 - \$14 million for Community Schools;
 - And baseline \$31 million for Learning to Work programs;
- Restore funding for the Promise NYC program with a \$25 million annual investment;
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth.

Restore \$197 million to 3-K and Pre-K early childhood education programs to preserve access for families.

Our City's child care system is facing serious challenges, such as unclear enrollment processes, delayed contract reimbursements to CBOs, and obstacles for hiring and retaining staff because of low salaries at CBO programs that are not on par with DOE staff doing the same work. These issues are discouraging people from working in child care, making it hard for providers to keep their doors open, and leading to underutilization of vital programs. Additionally, the system's mismanagement creates a false impression that there is little demand for child care in New York City, despite research showing that more than 80% of families with children under age 5 cannot afford child care in New York City.¹

Instead of addressing these problems, the City seems to be simply assuming there is no demand and is cutting funding. This shortsighted approach overlooks the real issues at hand and neglects the pressing need for affordable child care for working families. Settlement houses and community-based organizations are the backbone of the City's plan for early childhood education, so we are concerned by the impact these cuts will have on the New Yorkers who rely most on these services.

It is crucial to recognize and tackle the underlying challenges, ensuring that child care programs are not only maintained but also improved to meet the needs of families facing financial hardships.

In FY25, the City made one-time investments to stabilize the early childhood education system and improve accessibility for families that were not restored in the Mayor's FY26 Preliminary Budget. Including:

- **\$112 million** for 3-K programs, which includes \$20 million to support families that did not receive 3-K offers in 2024 and \$92 million to maintain general 3-K funding;
- **\$55 million** for additional special education Pre-K classes;
- **\$25 million** to convert ECE seats to extended day/extended year seats, giving working families longer hours of child care coverage; and
- **\$5 million** for family outreach support to ensure continuity of services across New York City.

We urge the City to **restore \$197 million for the Department of Education's Early Childhood Education programs that were not included in the FY26 Preliminary Budget.** New York City must work towards creating a high-quality, free, equitable, and universal child care system that meets the needs of all children and families and includes strong supports for workers and providers. This year, the City must take the next steps toward stabilizing the early childhood education system, while supporting and expanding access to care for families across the city.

Continue the path toward universal child care in New York City by funding 2 Care to create child care for 2-year olds, starting with a \$25.7 million investment to serve 1,000 children.

Free child care options for 2-year-olds in New York City are extremely limited, despite the fact that families spend an average of \$23,000² annually for care at this age. To support families and create a more comprehensive Birth-to-Five system, aging down the City's early childhood education system must be a top priority to ensure families with young children can remain in New York City.

¹ From Birth to Age 12: The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2023/10/CCC-From-Birth-to-Age-12-Child-Care-Affordability-and-Cost-Burden.pdf>

² Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision
<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/child-care-affordability-and-the-benefits-of-universal-provision/>

We envision *2 Care* as a free, full-day, full-year child care program for all 2-year-olds, with a simple application process mirroring that of Pre-K and 3-K, available centrally through the DOE or on-site at child care providers. We are advocating for a non-means-tested program that guarantees access to care regardless of a family's financial situation. The current system is failing families—80% of children who qualify for voucher programs do not receive benefits, leaving thousands without the care they need. Every child deserves quality care, and no parent should have to prove they deserve it. A truly accessible system must remove these barriers and establish child care as a right, not a privilege.

In FY26, the City could take the first step toward 2 Care by investing \$25.7 million to fund 1,000 seats across the five boroughs. Demographic and income data can help determine where programs should be located to meet the greatest need, while implementation could begin by leveraging existing licensed capacity and incorporating providers such as fee-for-service programs. The infrastructure for expansion already exists—when 3-K launched, existing classrooms were converted to accommodate the program, and many Family Child Care (FCC) providers already serve toddlers, making them a natural fit for this initiative.

Now is the time to act. Parents need these child care options, and with the DOE preparing to rebid its entire early childhood education system, this is a pivotal moment. If the City invests in care for 2-year-olds now, it will not only address an urgent need but also set a strong precedent for the upcoming procurement process.

Restore \$3.3 Million to Student Success Centers

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

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

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

Additionally, we urge the City to streamline the FY26 funding process to help providers understand earlier how much funding they should expect per site, and how to access this funding. In FY25, SSC providers were made to believe that school partners would allocate all College & Career Advising SAM funding to the SSC. However, school partners were not made aware of this assumption, leading some principals to refuse to allocate the full amount of funding, and reducing the total amount of operating funds available to the SSCs. Increased transparency and accountability for the roles of all stakeholders will improve the planning and implementation of SSCs.

Invest in Community Schools

Students learn better when their various physical and socio-emotional needs are met and when they have significant relationships with caring adults. If students are coming to their classes hungry, dealing with the stress of living in temporary housing, receiving inadequate mental or physical health care, or dealing with other social-emotional or economic hardships, it will only be that much harder to focus on academics. Community schools address those barriers by partnering with community based organizations in holistic and innovative ways, and represent a long-term resource coordination strategy to sustainably invest in youth, families, and communities.

Specifically, the success of the community schools is built on the pillars of integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. These inextricable elements work together to address socioeconomic and health disparities in schools and communities through a partnership between school staff and community based organizations to deliver wraparound services.

Given their track record of success³, the New York State Education Department recommended the community schools model as part of their reopening guidance to school districts,⁴ and the City committed to using federal stimulus funding to expand the number of NYC community schools from 266 to 406. The community school model is the best strategy for supporting the education spectrum: academic, enrichment, student and family support, engagement/ reengagement, and restorative justice policies and practices, and have also served as community centers of mental health through depression/anxiety screenings, in-house mental health services, and referrals to larger networks of support outside of the school. Community schools are also an investment in conflict mediation, a pliable model for delivering mental health services to young people to meet them where they are, and can be spaces for families to begin the steps of accessing culturally competent care for their children.

The City expanded the initiative from 267 to 406 schools using American Rescue Plan federal stimulus dollars. Despite baselining the majority of expiring Community School funding in the FY25 budget, \$14 million was only funded for one year. The future of these neighborhood lifelines remains unclear in the face of budget gaps.

Settlement houses within UNH's network operate 33 Community School contracts. UNH recommends smart and sustainable investments from the City in the Community Schools Initiative to support the long-term existence of these crucial services. Consistent and sustainable funding is critical to building community trust and authentic school-community partnerships.

The City's Community Schools Initiative should be baselined, and in order to do so, the City must utilize a sustainable funding source to fill in the gaps left by temporary American Rescue Plan dollars. **An investment of \$14 million is needed to restore one-year City funding, which would ensure continuity and maintain comprehensive services in FY26.**

Finally, the Department of Education's unique procurement process must be examined and reformed to address the lengthy contract registration process, delays in payment and an inconvenient bridge loan process. Community School providers are not reimbursed for provided services in a timely manner, making program planning and sustainability difficult. These are barriers to consistently delivering services.

Invest in Learning to Work

³ The RAND Corporation released a comprehensive report on the impact of NYC community schools [accessible here](#).

⁴ [Guidance accessible here](#)

The Learning to Work (LTW) model supports students in Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC) as they work towards their high school diploma and the development of a post-secondary plan. Community based organizations (CBOs) are embedded in the fabric of these schools through LTW contracts with the DOE and provide academic and socioemotional support, career and college exploration, skills development, internships, and much more.

The Learning to Work model is available citywide in 46 Transfer Schools and 20 YABCs. Settlement houses operate 27 of these contracts. In the 2019-2020 school year, LTW providers supported 16,446 students and provided 3,006 internships, which amounted to over \$9 million in revenue to students.

According to the 2023 NYC School Survey, students in LTW programs generally felt safer and more supported than non-LTW high schools. Of students in LTW programs, 89% reported that conflicts were resolved fairly at their school, in contrast with 70% at non-LTW schools. Additionally, 93% of LTW students reported that adults at their school helped them plan for the future, in contrast with only 81% of students in non-LTW programs.

Although funding for LTW programs was restored in the FY26 Preliminary Budget, there was no funding secured for the out years. UNH urges the City to **baseline LTW's full \$31 million budget through sustainable funding sources.**

Additionally, the last full LTW procurement was in 2014, making it over 10 years since the program was re-bid and saw an increase in the base funding. Last year, Eskolta's assessment of LTW programs was released, highlighting the need for a reprocurement to update the model for today's population of LTW students, and for increased funding to address staffing shortages. UNH urges DOE to release the Request for Proposals this year.

Restore and baseline ACS's Promise NYC program at \$25 million to provide child care to children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidized child care.

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

Promise NYC was funded at \$25 million in the City's FY 2025 budget, and this increased investment has helped clear waitlists across the program. However, this funding was not baselined, so programs are anticipating that child care will end on June 30th and families will abruptly be left without a child care arrangement. We urge the City to **restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC** in the FY 2026 budget so that families can continue to access the affordable, subsidized child care they need.

Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth

Despite having completed four years of Summer Rising, the City has still released no data on its efficacy and has not conducted a formal evaluation of the model. In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this program, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released [One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families.](#) Some of our key findings were:

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

With an early restoration of summer programming, **the City should use a portion of the dedicated summer funding to pilot alternative summer programming models for middle school students.**

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child’s preference, but most low-income families are reliant on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement. Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them, and, if youth, parents, and staff are reporting frustration with the current model, the City should pivot to alternative models that have the potential to re-engage them. Allowing for multiple summer programming models would also provide district-level flexibility to better serve English Language Learners and students with disabilities. In the current model, there is little room for flexibility and limited resources to provide these young people with the proper support.

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



**Testimony on behalf of Volunteers of America-Greater New York
The New York City Council Committee on Education
Preliminary Budget Hearings
March 13th, 2025**

Introduction and Thanks

My name is Eric Lee, Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony for this hearing.

About Us

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

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the Committee, for your unwavering leadership and support of students in temporary housing. **VOA-GNY would greatly appreciate your support in urging the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to resume its donation to Operation Backpack[®] for FY26 with an allocation of \$500,000 dollars**, our signature service campaign which partners with the DOE and our sister organizations to provide grade-specific school supplies to every school-aged child in the shelter system prior to the first day of school. **We are also seeking the support of Council Members throughout the city (Discretionary Request Ref #179272) to offset the rising cost of this campaign as DOE participation remains uncertain** and ensure that we can continue to help homeless kids get their school year off to a strong start in the 2025-26 school year.

In 2024, in response to historic budget pressures, the DOE stopped financial support and in-kind donations for Operation Backpack[®]. By cobbling together private support to cover this shortfall, **VOA-GNY was able to successfully provide backpacks and school supplies to 19,000 students living in shelter last year** but still shy of the need as the City's family shelter population surged in part due to the influx of recently arrived New Yorkers. Adding to our disappointment that we couldn't reach every child, VOA-GNY later learned that despite the record need, the DOE actually left money on the table for Students in Temporary Housing by the end of the school year for lack of an efficient way to coordinate spending to get those students what they needed. To right that egregious wrong, it is critically important that the DOE partner with us so that we can lend our expertise in coordinating with DHS and HRA at the shelter level before the first day of school, matching supplies to students instead of schools who don't yet know what their actual enrollment of homeless students will look like.

Background on Operation Backpack[®]

Beginning in 2003 as a small initiative to provide gently-worn backpacks and supplies to children living within our own shelters, it has grown to be one of the largest school drives in the area, helping students



in VOA-GNY shelters and more than 200 others across the five boroughs. Operation Backpack® prioritizes respect for the child by ensuring that backpacks and supplies are distributed within shelters prior to the start of the school year to avoid inadvertently feelings of being singled out as “in need”. We purchase a variety of backpack brands and designs commonly worn by students today and filled with supplies based on requirement lists from 30+ public schools and adjusted based on feedback from parents, teachers, and of course the students who are at the heart of Operation Backpack®.

Our program works both on the human level – by taking away the stigma and preparing children early – and, on the operational efficiency level – by taking the guesswork out of which schools these children may enroll in on the first day and matching the supplies directly to the student alleviating principals of the burden of projecting need. This approach ensures that every dollar is put to good use and every child has what they need.

With the number of homeless families reaching an all-time high in FY25, the significance of Operation Backpack® has never been greater. **As the Committee well knows, helping children succeed in school is critical to interrupting the cycle of intergenerational poverty.** Ensuring students are well-equipped with school supplies leads to increased rates of homework completion, class participation, and, ultimately, graduation.

VOA-GNY would greatly appreciate the Council’s leadership in urging the Department of Education to re-establish support for Project Backpack®, and we graciously welcome Council Members to support the work of this critical campaign through our Member Item Request to help students in temporary housing succeed in the coming school year.

Thank you to the Committee on Education and the entire Council for your continued leadership and advocacy for students in New York City. Through ensuring that students within our communities have the resources and supports they need to achieve, we can continue to build a thriving City for future generations. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Eric Lee.

If you have any questions, please contact me at elee@voa-gny.org.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**New York City Council
Committee on Education, Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair**

**Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York
Submitted by Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy**

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Education**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is among the City's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult — and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities.

The YMCA is also a proud member of the Campaign for Children (C4C), Coalition for Community School Excellence (CCSE), and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEF). As a member of these coalitions we support their policy and budget agendas.

We thank the City Council, Chair Joseph, and Speaker Adams for their steadfast partnership and advocacy in securing critical investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. These investments ensured the continuation of essential education programs, staff, and services that were at risk of ending due to the expiration of temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While we appreciate the Administration's decision to baseline many of these programs, others received funding for one year only, meaning funding will expire at the end of June unless our city leaders act in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

In partnership with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, we call on the city to baseline funding for vital education programs that are currently sustained by temporary city dollars and face significant cuts in July. These include 3-K, preschool special education classes, community schools, restorative justice initiatives, the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family outreach, and more. Additionally, we urge further investments to support students—particularly those with the greatest needs.

YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK 5 West 63rd Street New York, NY 10023
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YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK | Where there's a Y, there's a way.

Budgets reflect our priorities. A budget without stable, sustainable funding for education sends a clear message to students, families, educators, and nonprofit providers that their futures are not a priority. We urge the Administration to act in the Executive Budget, ensuring continued investment in the programs and services that sustain our children's well-being and development. Let us make a commitment to elevate and empower the next generation of New Yorkers.

Early Childhood Education

Community-based organizations like ours are the backbone of the city's plan for early childhood education, so we are concerned by the impact a loss of funding to the early childhood education system will have on the New Yorkers who rely most on our services to make sure their children begin their educational journeys in safe environments. We need to do our part for the families in the city who are overburdened by the cost of living, the cost of childcare, and face the loss of critical supports for their young ones.

Citywide, [80% of families cannot afford](#) childcare or after school programs:

- Across the city, families can pay up to 63% of their annual income on childcare or after school care, with the Bronx and Brooklyn being the most impacted boroughs.
- The inability to secure childcare resulted in a [loss of \\$23 billion in economic activity](#) in NYC in 2022.
- New Yorkers departing the city at the fastest rate in 2023 were families making between \$32,000 and \$65,000 annually.

The YMCA's early childhood programs serve nearly 800 children. The need for early childhood education continues to increase across the city, with the YMCA having a waitlist at more than half of our program sites. Early childhood education is a vital part of New York City's social and economic ecosystems, as it allows parents and guardians to go to work, supports the development and enrichment of children, and enhances the quality of life for some of our most vulnerable communities. To sustain these ecosystems, as well as meet the growing need for youth programs and early childhood education, community-based organizations like the YMCA need seamless support from our agency partners. This means fully staffed divisions, clear and timely communication, and designated points of contact. This way we can ensure a smooth process in hiring and onboarding staff, and in turn have the support we need to maximize our enrollment.

Additionally, to ensure equity and access, NYCPS needs to enable nonprofit providers of early childhood education to directly enroll children and youth onsite. We must strengthen our city's early childhood system, by protecting Pre-K and 3-K, expanding access to full day/year-round programs for all children, especially infants and toddlers, and achieving salary parity for early childhood educators.

Budget Recommendations for Early Childhood Education:

Build a stronger, more inclusive future for our city by investing in and baselining the following early childhood education programs that are only funded through FY 2025:

- \$112M for 3-K
- \$25M for extended day early childhood programs
- \$5M for outreach for early childhood education programs
- \$55M for Special Education Pre-K classes
- \$25M for Promise NYC

Community Schools

New York City boasts one of the largest portfolios of Community Schools in the country, serving as a national leader in implementing and upholding this transformative model. Any cuts to these programs—no matter the scale—threaten the remarkable progress Community Schools have made in improving student attendance, supporting social and emotional well-being, and connecting families to critical resources such as food and health care.

The YMCA operates ten Community Schools across the city, each dedicated to setting students on the path to success by fostering essential life skills, community engagement, and leadership development. Beyond academics, Community School providers play a crucial role in delivering real-time support and solutions to families in times of crisis. During the onset of the pandemic, they were among the first responders, providing essentials such as food, clothing, translation services, and electronic devices for remote learning. They also mobilized aid for families affected by the Bronx Fire tragedy and continue to support asylum-seeking students as they adjust to new classrooms and communities. Community Schools are more than educational institutions—they are pillars of stability that extend beyond the classroom walls. Any disinvestment in them would create a void in the community and erode trust in both the city and service providers.

We are grateful to our city leaders for their commitment to Community Schools, including their decision to invest, restore, and baseline more than \$50 million in Fiscal Year 2025 and beyond. However, 67 Community Schools are still facing a \$14 million funding gap, including \$5 million for 10 schools in the zip codes hardest hit by the pandemic and 52 campus model contracts. We stand with the Coalition for Community School Excellence in urging the Administration to restore and baseline the remaining \$14 million to fully sustain our Community Schools.

At this critical moment for young people and communities, New York City must reaffirm its commitment to the Community Schools strategy and continue investing in the programs that empower our students, families, and neighborhoods.

Budget Recommendations for Community Schools:

- Fund and baseline \$9.16M in this year's Executive Budget to maintain essential support for the 52 campus model contracts.
- Fund and baseline \$5 million for the 10 Community Schools funded through the NYC Council's initiative to support communities most impacted by COVID-19.

- Ongoing investment is needed to address delays in contract registration and timely payments to nonprofit providers. The YMCA is currently owed almost \$100,000 for services rendered in the prior school year. The procurement process for NYCPS and city agencies must be reformed to eliminate lengthy contract registration, payment delays, and the burdensome bridge loan process—barriers that jeopardize the financial stability of community-based organizations and nonprofit organizations.

Essential Education Programs currently funded by one-year city funding

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

- 3-K programs for thousands of young children (\$112M).
- Preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities (\$55M).
- Extended day seats for 3-K and Pre-K to help meet the needs of working parents (\$25M) the .
- Outreach efforts to help ensure families are aware of the early childhood programs available to them (\$5M).
- Arts programming so that students can get exposure to the arts in their schools (\$41M).
- 67 community schools – providing after-school programs, mental healthcare, food pantries, and more to school communities (\$14M).
- Restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (\$12M).
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as well as the new class size requirements (\$10M).
- The Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn (\$5M).
- Immigrant family communication and outreach to help ensure families can receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access (\$4M).
- High impact tutoring to help students get the support they need in reading and math (\$4M).
- Student Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college (\$3.3M).

Funding for these essential programs is set to expire, and without additional investment in the budget, they risk being rolled back or eliminated as soon as July. The loss of these programs would jeopardize access to a quality education, undermining children's foundational years and threatening families' economic stability. We cannot afford to let these vital services disappear. We must commit to sustainably funding these programs in Fiscal Year 2026 and beyond.

We urge the Council to carefully examine these programs and their long-term funding needs, ensuring the protection of key services for young children, youth, and families across the city. Your leadership, advocacy, and partnership are invaluable in delivering quality education and support services—helping more young people learn, grow, and thrive. Thank you for your

unwavering commitment to fighting for the children, families, educators, and nonprofit providers of New York City.

If you have any questions, please contact Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy, at cbaytemur@ymcanyc.org.



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March 13, 2025

**Testimony of Alicia Vaichunas
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education
Hearing on the Preliminary Budget**

Dear Chair Joseph and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alicia Vaichunas, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the importance of ensuring stable and responsible funding for early childhood education, special education services, school transportation, and after-school programs.

As a longtime civic leader, candidate for City Council, and a firm believer in policies that make life easier for families, I urge the Council to prioritize investments that deliver real results for students and working parents.

Fixing the Broken School Bus System

For years, I have heard from countless parents—and experienced firsthand—the disaster that is New York City’s school bus system. Children are left waiting for hours for delayed buses, or worse, the buses don’t show up at all. This is unacceptable. Parents rely on school transportation to ensure their children get to school safely and on time. Yet, every year, we deal with the same chronic mismanagement, driver shortages, and unreliable service.

These transportation failures disproportionately affect families with young children and students with disabilities—many of whom rely on busing as their only means of getting to school. Without reliable service, parents are forced to miss work, children fall behind academically, and the entire system suffers.

The city must:

- Ensure proper funding to hire and retain enough drivers to cover all routes.
- Demand greater accountability from the DOE and contracted bus companies—if they can’t do the job, they shouldn’t get paid.
- Upgrade routing technology to ensure efficiency and reduce delays.
- Expand alternative transportation options for students who qualify for busing but are routinely left stranded.

It’s time to stop making excuses and fix this issue once and for all. If we can’t even get children to school on time, how can we expect them to succeed?

Protecting and Strengthening 3-K and 4-K

Early childhood education is not just an expense—it's an investment in our future. Programs like 3-K and 4-K provide young children with the foundation they need to succeed in school and beyond. At the same time, they allow parents—especially working-class families—to remain in the workforce. The proposed budget cuts to these programs are shortsighted and will ultimately hurt both families and businesses. Rather than slashing funding, the city should look at ways to make these programs more efficient, ensuring taxpayer dollars go directly to classrooms, teachers, and students—not wasteful bureaucracy.

In addition, I support efforts to expand access to affordable child care for 2-year-olds through 2-Care, making it easier for parents to balance work and family without breaking the bank. The cost of child care in New York City is out of control, and many parents are being forced to make difficult financial decisions or even consider leaving the city. To keep New York competitive, we must ensure families have access to affordable, high-quality options.

Fixing Special Education Services

For too long, children with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) and IESPs (Individualized Education Services Plans) have been left waiting for services they are legally entitled to receive. Bureaucratic delays, staffing shortages, and budget mismanagement have made it difficult for families to get the help they need. If the city is serious about supporting all children, then it must ensure that special education funding is fully restored and that these students receive timely evaluations and services—without forcing parents to fight tooth and nail for them.

Strengthening Summer and After-School Programs

Programs like Summer Rising and after-school activities don't just help students stay engaged—they also help keep them out of trouble. These initiatives provide structure, learning opportunities, and recreation for children while giving working parents peace of mind. However, for them to be effective, they need proper funding and better coordination between the Department of Education (DOE) and community organizations.

Instead of cutting these programs, the city should focus on ensuring they are run efficiently, with more accountability and fewer unnecessary administrative costs. Every dollar wasted in bureaucracy is a dollar that could be spent on actual services for kids.

Using Schools as Community Hubs

Another common-sense policy is keeping school buildings open after hours so that children have a safe place for recreation, tutoring, and enrichment programs.

Many neighborhoods don't have enough open spaces for kids to play, and by using existing school facilities, we can maximize resources without requiring massive new expenditures. This is the kind of practical, cost-effective thinking we need more of in government.

Conclusion

New York City's education budget must reflect real priorities—giving families the support they need without wasteful spending or unnecessary cuts that hurt children. We must ensure that early childhood education remains fully funded, that children with special needs get the support they deserve, that school buses actually arrive on time, and that after-school and summer programs are strengthened to keep kids learning and engaged.

I urge this committee and the full Council to take a hard look at where taxpayer dollars are going and to focus funding on the programs that actually help families. With responsible governance and smart investment, we can ensure that New York remains a place where families can thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia Vaichunas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alicia" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Vaichunas".

Alicia Vaichunas

Civic Leader and Candidate for Council District 30

Testimony of Aarmeen Khan
Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Education, Preliminary Budget Hearing
Thursday, March 23, 2024

Good Afternoon Chair Joseph and City Council members. My name is Aarmeen Khan, and I am a senior at The Brooklyn Latin School. I have been a Youth Advocate for school lunch for the past three years, and over the years I have developed a great partnership with the Food Ed Hub. I have had the opportunity to present the YFA Menu Survey report to both Chair Joseph and to Food Ed Hub partners and they have all acknowledged our hard work and hope to hear more of our voices.

Today, I come here to support the proposed \$250,000 grant to help renew funding for the Food Ed Hub, which can ensure more students, especially those from low-income families, housing-insecure households, and single-parent families can receive the food and nutrition education they need to lead healthier lives.

Accessing healthy nutritious food is a basic human right, and with the current Food Ed Hub programs in place additional funding will enable more students and their communities in 100 additional schools to benefit from food ed programming directly, as well as provide professional development opportunities to staff. This would also help with Summer Rising programs and allow students to continue receiving nutritious meals and hands-on food education experiences when school is out. These changes will help ensure that students, particularly those from food insecure families where summer meals may be the only nutritious meal they have, can have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.

With your support for these changes, students like me could feel affirmed and valued, and know that we are the focus of why we are all here today. You affirm our value as students and prioritize our needs at the forefront of your decision-making. Your continued support is indispensable in realizing our vision for a city that fosters growth, inclusivity, and opportunity for all.

As we stand on the cusp of transformative change, we express our deepest gratitude for your consideration of this vital issue. We hope you will continue championing causes and allocating resources toward initiatives that empower and uplift students across our city. Then, we all can create a future where every student thrives.

Thank you for your time.

Good afternoon,

My name is Dr. Abby Emerson. I am an educational researcher and education professor who previously taught 5th grade here in NYC. I am also currently a parent to three children enrolled in the DOE.

I am here today to strongly advocate for 3 areas completely missing from the budget.

The benefits of early childhood programming in the research are bountiful – too many to count. The current funding for 3-K, preschool special education classes, extended day seats—totaling over \$190 million—is essential. These programs provide young learners with critical social, emotional, and cognitive foundations that shape their futures.

Beyond their individual benefits, it makes economic sense too. Research from the National Bureau of Economic Research has explored the long-term impact of early childhood programming and documents the financial benefits not just for the children who attended, but THEIR children as well. We need stable, long-term, guaranteed funding to establish these as bedrocks of the DOE, not simply something we have to advocate for year after year.

Arts programming is not a luxury—it's a necessity. It enhances students' creative thinking, academic performance, and emotional resilience. There's a reason that private schools advertise their arts programming so heavily. Cutting or reducing the arts would rob *our* public school students of critical opportunities for self-expression and personal growth.

Restorative Justice

Last year I conducted a literature review on restorative justice in schools where I read over 40 pieces of scholarship related to the topic.

First, restorative justice keeps young people in school. RJ has been proven to reduce suspensions, detentions, and things that keep youth away from learning.

Second, restorative justice improves school climate, which in turn, keeps kids in school. They want to be there. Beyond that, an improved school climate is an improved workplace for teachers, which lowers teacher turnover.

Cutting funding for RJ would mean turning our backs on a proven strategies for creating safer and more inclusive school environments.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dr. Abby Emerson





My name is Abrar Bhuiyan. I'm in 10th grade and a student at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. I am also a Restorative Justice youth leader at my school! I am here to show how important Restorative Justice is in schools and prove that the city should listen to students when we stand up for full RJ funding and ask to demilitarize schools.

In my school, we are immediately met by metal detectors and school safety with mysterious, ominous, black belts. When we arrive at school, we should be welcomed by our community, by our teachers, who are greeting us with positive affirmations. A city-wide, student-centered, commitment to restorative justice means building community safety and responding to harm when it occurs. We are calling on the city to protect the funding for restorative justice in our schools, and also expand it to make sure all students have access to school-based Restorative Justice.

Funding should also be included for students to lead restorative justice in their schools. By being an RJ youth leader I have learned that the core of RJ is building healthy relationships. Schools right now are not focused on community and that is why we have low attendance rates, lower test scores, and more conflicts. RJ creates a safer and more respectful environment where people feel heard by encouraging everyone to understand each other's feelings and work together to make things right. RJ reduces repeat behaviors because it helps students develop social and emotional skills.

I urge you to invest in RJ programs in schools because it creates a positive and supportive environment for students instead of a punitive, punishment based environment. Unlike suspension and school police, RJ focuses on understanding, accountability, and healing. RJ not only focuses on behavior but also builds essential skills like empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. So by funding RJ programs we are investing in a healthier, more respectful future for the students and our city. Thank you.

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FAX 914 948 0311

Aisha Green

[REDACTED]

New York, NY, 10030

12 March 2025

Dear New York City Council,

Support for Food Education and Nutrition Security

As a graduate student of nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University, I am writing to express my support for the renewal of funding for the Food Education Hub, a vital initiative that strengthens collaboration among food education providers in New York City. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that students, especially those from low-income families, housing-insecure households, and single-parent families, receive the food and nutrition education necessary to lead healthier, more sustainable lives.

The importance of food and nutrition education cannot be overstated. According to the American Heart Association (2020), educating children about proper nutrition can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, conditions that are disproportionately affecting children in low-income communities. In New York City, over 1 in 4 children live in food-insecure households, with the highest rates found in communities of color (New York City Department of Health, 2022). The Food Education Hub plays a critical role in addressing these disparities by offering programs that teach students how to make nutritious food choices, despite the limited access to fresh produce and healthy options in their neighborhoods.

Renewing funding for the Food Education Hub will also directly contribute to reducing the prevalence of preventable diseases. Research has shown that nutrition education can lead to significant improvements in health outcomes, such as lowering blood pressure, reducing body mass index (BMI), and improving overall well-being (CDC, 2020). These changes not only promote a healthier future for individuals but also alleviate the strain on our public healthcare system, which is currently burdened by the high costs of treating preventable diseases. By investing in nutrition education now, we can build a stronger, healthier community for years to come.

This funding can be used for expanding Training Programs for Educators and Community Leaders. It can be used to provide specialized training for food education providers, equipping them with effective tools and strategies to teach nutrition in classrooms and community spaces. This would include creating new curriculum materials and offering professional development workshops. It can also be used to support Hands-On Learning Experiences like establishing and expanding community gardens, cooking classes, and

farm-to-table initiatives that offer students and their families practical, real-world experiences in food education.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing this important issue. I urge you to support the renewal of funding for the Food Education Hub, which will not only benefit New York City's most vulnerable communities but will also promote a healthier, more equitable future for all.

Sincerely,

Aisha Green

References:

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New York City Department of Health. (2022). Food insecurity in New York City: A look at the numbers. NYC Health. <https://www.nyc.gov/food-insecurity>

Alden Davis

Brooklyn, NY, 11205

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The high cost of childcare has made it nearly impossible to stay living in the city I have grown up and love. When my eldest got into 3k it literally felt like a lottery win. Without the 3k there was no way we could have stayed here. We have a younger one and we are sinking deeper and deeper into debt with the cheapest monthly care we can get find that allows us to keep working. Child care including summer care costs us around 55,000

As a born and raised New Yorker, I want to keep my family here and show the kids how amazing this city is, and everything that it has to offer. Getting a 3k sport legitimately changed our thinking on how long we can be here. We are hoping our youngest can get in next year and we can actually afford to save some money

February 11, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Alena Kastin, and I am a parent of two children in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Both of my children have learned and grown so much at Pantomima. The quality of education and care that they have received is unmatched. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare. Additionally, centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Our community needs high quality educational centers like Pantomima. It is one of the reasons that I love living in Sunset Park.

I have seen many friends leave the city due to the affordability crisis. As someone who was born and raised in Brooklyn, I want my kids to be able to grow up in this wonderful community, but the hurdles for young families are multiplying each year as the cost of living goes up.

Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services to places like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Alena Kastin
Parent of 2 and Advocate



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(212) 877-1103

Testimony of Alix Torres, 11th grade student:

Hello my name is Alix and I appreciate this chance to testify at the hearing today. I'm in eleventh grade at The Global Learning Collaborative and thanks to the Generation Citizen Program I have the opportunity to testify before you today.

An issue that greatly speaks to me is the effects of classes on the learning ability of the students. My class examined issues that affect us in our community and came to a consensus on one item to address together. After much deliberation, we decided to focus on the consequences of budget cuts on merging classes, notably larger class sizes, and established a goal of advocating for more resources to ensure a quality education for all children and sufficient accommodation for all teachers.

Maintaining the school budget is essential to reaching our goal because cramped classrooms hinder learning and make it hard for teachers to give each student individualized attention. Attention directed towards students is extremely beneficial since it makes us feel seen. It helps us students connect with our teachers and feel secure enough to ask the proper questions without feeling embarrassed. Teacher attention has a huge impact on our learning (helping us understand the concept), our motivation, behavior, and our overall well-being. Individualized attention promotes academic performance, increases engagement, encourages positive conduct, and builds our self-esteem.

The fact is, large class sizes are harmful for education. As a student who has attended classes that could easily be broken into two, this has had a significant impact on my ability to concentrate and feel at ease in the classroom. A big student body forced the teachers' attention to shift away from aiding students who needed it and toward the students who are creating distraction. In a smaller class, this problem would have been much easier to resolve.

Finally, I ask you to prioritize funding for our schools so that every student has access to a decent education. Budget cuts have resulted in overcrowded classrooms, fewer resources, and insufficient support, all of which have a negative influence on learning. Students deserve to thrive in an atmosphere with teachers who have availability to support them and the resources they require to achieve. I ask that you protect and enhance school funding in order to lower class sizes, restore critical resources, and invest in our education's future. Our success is dependent on your actions, and we hope you will join with students in making education a priority. Thank you for your time and attention.

Allie Baker

[REDACTED]

Brooklyn, NY, 11217

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We pay around 40k a year for daycare. That is about \$160,000 total for our two children. This is an absurd amount of money. We are a family with two working parents so there is no way around having full time child care but it negatively affects our family and leads me to wonder how parents making less money manage it.

We pay around 40k a year for daycare. That is about \$160,000 total for our two children. This is an absurd amount of money. We are a family with two working parents so there is no way around having full time child care but it negatively affects our family and leads me to wonder how parents making less money manage it. All of our plans hinge on having universal 3k and prek. It enabled us to have a second child because we couldn't have afforded to pay for private daycare for both of them at the same time. We will be able to move to a larger and more expensive apartment once we don't have a 3000+ payment per month. Everyone should have access to a 3k and prek seat in the city and adding 2 care to it would be even more of a game changer. It needs to happen.

Allison L'Heureux
[REDACTED]
New York, NY 10024

March 14th, 2024

Council Member Rita Joseph
Chair of the New York City Council Committee on Education

Dear Council Member Joseph,

My name is Allison L'Heureux, and I am a graduate student who is studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. In the wake of unprecedented federal funding cuts, I am deeply concerned that the nutrition and food security of children in the NYC public school system is at risk. As such, I urge you to support expanding food access and nutrition education for NYC children by providing sustained funding to the Food Ed Coalition and their proposals, namely their requests for funding to amplify diverse community voices in the assessment of existing food programs and to expand support for the Summer Rising, Summer Meal Support program through implementing changes to the requirements for meals provided.

The first request for funding is to support the proposed joint initiative to be conducted by the Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute that will directly assess the impact of critical food programs in NYC on the diverse communities that they serve. The 2024 NYC Food Standards Compliance Report demonstrates an average compliance rate of 80% and 95% to NYC food standards for the NYC Public Schools – Division of Early Childhood Education and the NYC Public Schools – Office of Food and Nutrition Services, respectively.¹ Despite these overall high numbers and improvements in compliance to the standards since 2023, this data does little to demonstrate the impact of NYC public school food programs on the lives of the children and families that they serve.

The proposed initiative from the Tisch Food Center and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute will provide the necessary qualitative data to supplement existing quantitative analyses by amplifying the voices of the diverse community members served by NYC public school food programs. This will promote greater efficiency in the use of valuable time and funding while also elevating the voices of community members who are too often unacknowledged and underrepresented. Learning about the efficacy of current food initiatives, like Plant Powered Fridays, will lead to more effective future initiatives that truly support the health and wellbeing of NYC children.

Second, I urge you to consider expanding support for the Summer Rising, Summer Meal Support program with Food Ed Programming to ensure that children of low-income families have adequate access to nutritious foods all year round. By requiring that meals be served prior to

¹ NYC Food Policy. (2024). *New York City food standards: 2024 compliance report*.

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/NYC-Food-Standards-Compliance-2024.pdf>.

classroom instruction or at least before dismissal, more students will be able to participate in the meal program and receive nutritious food that they may not otherwise be receiving at home during the summer months.


Additionally, recent reports have illustrated that the Summer Rising program has already proven to have an incredibly positive impact on the math and reading education of participating students.² Creating more guidelines that support summer food access for these students will only further improve their learning outcomes, as food insecurity is known to have a negative impact on children's academic performance, especially in reading and math performance.³

In summary, I urge you to provide increased support to the Food Ed Coalition and their proposals dedicated to improving the quality of existing NYC public school food programs and initiatives. Their efforts will work to ensure that NYC children will have continued access to healthy foods and nutrition education resources delivered in methods that will be most impactful to them.

Thank you for your consideration on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Allison L'Heureux



² NYC Public Schools. (2025). *Summer Rising 2024 impact analysis*. https://pwsblobprd.schools.nyc/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summer-rising-2024-impact-analysis-web-deck.pdf?sfvrsn=62dd096a_2#:~:text=Summer%20Rising%20had%20a%20statistically,learning%20loss%20for%20a ll%20students.&text=All%20Summer%20Rising%20students%20grew,from%200.025%20SU%20last%20year.

³ Jyoti, D. F., Frongillo, E. A., Jones, S. J. (2005). Food insecurity affects school children's academic performance, weight gain, and social skills. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 135(12), 2831-2839. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/135.12.2831>

Ally Latvala



New York, NY 10025

13 March 2025

Ms. Rita Joseph
Chair of New York City Council Education Committee
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Member Joseph,

Support for Developing Culturally Responsive Food Education Standards

My name is Ally Latvala, and I am a graduate student in nutrition education at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing on behalf of the Tisch Food Center Food Ed Hub. The Food Ed Hub works to increase access to both nutritious food and nutrition education for NYC students. I want to express my fervent support for the development and implementation of culturally responsive, research-based standards for food education in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS). It is my hope that the New York City Council education committee will include and compensate community-based organizations (CBOs) for help with the development of these standards. I will advocate for these standards based on both the research and my personal experiences in K-12 education.

The NYC Public School System is one of the most diverse in the country with nearly 85% of all students coming from minority racial and ethnic groups.¹ Our students have diverse needs, and their nutrition education must be accommodating of that. There is evidence that culturally tailoring nutrition information for children can increase fruit, vegetable, and whole grain consumption.² These foods are essential for preventing the development or worsening of diet-related disease, the top cause of death in all racial and ethnic groups in NYC.³ Nutrition education cannot take on a “one size fits all” approach. Students must learn how to incorporate nutritious foods into their unique cultures to be engaged with the material.

I teach nutrition and gardening at P.S. 36 Margaret Douglas Elementary School, and I have personally witnessed the benefits of culturally inclusive activities. In one lesson, the students reflected on their various family traditions around food, their experiences with cooking, and their favorite foods. The students shared their experiences with the class with such enthusiasm and pride. I watched their faces light up as they talked about these special memories, showing me

1. New York City Council. (2019). *School Diversity in NYC*. <https://council.nyc.gov/data/school-diversity-in-nyc/#tech-appendix>.

2. Koh, L., Durkin, A. C., Fiske, S., & Hingorani, U. (2025). Culturally-tailored plant-based interventions to improve health outcomes in pediatric populations: An integrative review. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 52, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2025.103024>.

3. NYC Health. (2025). *Addressing Unacceptable Inequities: A Chronic Disease Strategy for New York City*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/about/chronic-disease-strategy-nyc.pdf>.

how central their cultures are to their eating. Culturally inclusive food education will allow students to best absorb the information.

In addition to teaching, I have extensive experience writing nutrition curricula for middle and high school students with the non-profit organization Be Real USA. In my work there, I also witnessed the importance of culturally inclusive education. Once we had a draft of a nutrition curriculum titled *Let's Eat*, we sought feedback from educators and nutrition professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their input opened my eyes to the many ways our lesson was not culturally relevant. For example, we had a section about mindful eating but realized this nutrition practice would not fit into many students' eating cultures at home. If we had not made the curriculum culturally responsive, it would not be able to reach as many students.

To best educate NYC students with culturally responsive and research-based nutrition curricula, the New York City Council education committee must support community-based organizations to develop standards. The Food Ed Coalition and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding would be excellent sources of these organizations. I ask that you first identify a diverse range of CBOs and then support them with funding to develop these food education standards. Students in NYC come from a variety of backgrounds, each with unique food traditions, values, and health practices. By creating culturally responsive food education standards in partnership with CBOs we can better serve the needs of every student, ensuring they feel seen. With the development of culturally appropriate standards, we will improve the health of our next generation of leaders. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing your response on this important issue using my contact information listed below.

Sincerely,
Ally Latvala, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

[REDACTED]

New York, NY 10025

[REDACTED]

Amelia Cox

Student, Teachers College
Columbia University

New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Amelia Cox, and I am a student at Teachers College, Columbia University, currently pursuing a Master's degree in Nutrition Education. I am writing to strongly advocate for the increased funding and expansion of the Health Bucks program in New York City, a vital initiative that promotes nutrition security for low-income residents by making fresh, healthy food more accessible.

The Health Bucks program is a critical resource that provides financial incentives for low-income New Yorkers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets. However, with the growing demand for nutritious food in underserved communities, it is clear that the program is currently underfunded. I urge the New York City Council to prioritize and increase funding for the Health Bucks program to ensure that all New Yorkers—especially those in food-insecure neighborhoods—have the opportunity to access healthy, affordable food.

Food insecurity remains a significant issue in New York City, with over 1.5 million residents experiencing hunger or limited access to nutritious food (Food Bank for New York City, 2020). The Health Bucks program has proven to be an effective tool in addressing this crisis by providing vouchers that can be used at farmers' markets to purchase fresh produce. However, due to limited funding, many individuals and families who could benefit from this program are unable to access it. Expanding this program will directly address both the affordability and accessibility of healthy food, which are key barriers to nutrition security for low-income residents.

Increasing funding for Health Bucks will also improve public health outcomes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease disproportionately affect individuals in lower-income communities, where access to healthy food is often limited. By increasing access to affordable fresh produce, we can help prevent and manage these chronic diseases, ultimately reducing healthcare costs and improving quality of life for vulnerable populations.

The primary beneficiaries of increased funding for the Health Bucks program will be low-income families, children, seniors, and individuals living in food deserts throughout New York City. According to a study by the NYC Department of Health, nearly 30% of NYC residents live in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh food, a condition known as a "food desert" (NYC Department of Health, 2018). For these residents, the Health Bucks program provides an essential lifeline to healthier food choices.

Additionally, seniors, who often live on fixed incomes, and children, whose diets are critical to their development, would greatly benefit from an expanded Health Bucks program. By giving these groups greater access to nutritious food, we can help ensure that all New Yorkers are able to make healthy dietary choices regardless of their income level.

The City Council should support increased funding for the Health Bucks program because it aligns with broader public health goals and social justice initiatives. Investing in the Health Bucks program is not only an investment in the health of low-income communities but also an investment in the future of New York City. By improving access to healthy food, the city can help prevent chronic diseases that drive up healthcare costs and reduce the strain on our public health systems. Additionally, expanding the program would contribute to the local economy by supporting farmers' markets and local food producers.

The impact of the Health Bucks program is well-documented. A study by the NYC Department of Health found that participants who used Health Bucks were more likely to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables, thereby improving their overall diet quality (NYC Department of Health, 2019). Moreover, research from the American Journal of Public Health has shown that food assistance programs like Health Bucks can reduce food insecurity while improving dietary habits and health outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2018).

Increased funding for this program would not only support these positive outcomes but also help reduce the food insecurity that affects millions of New Yorkers. Expanding the Health Bucks program would give more families access to the fresh, healthy food they need to thrive, while simultaneously contributing to the health and well-being of the city as a whole.

I respectfully urge the City Council to increase funding for the Health Bucks program and ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of income, have the opportunity to access fresh and nutritious food. This is a critical step toward improving nutrition security and public health in our city.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support for this important initiative.

Sincerely,
Amelia Cox
Student, Teachers College
Columbia University

Works Cited

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Ana Gallego

[REDACTED]

Kew Gardens, NY, 11415

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My family pays \$17,000 per year for 2-care.

Government supporting child care centers, and DOHMH/DOE oversight, so that the children are appropriately cared for and the caretakers are compensated at a living wage is necessary for me and my husband to be part of the workforce.

Even after the govt investment in 2k and 3k, we would still pay for aftercare/extended hours, plus either taking time off (and risking our jobs) or paying \$200 dollars of private sitter EVERY DAY that the school is closed for a holiday or that our toddler is recovering from illness.

Care is the job that makes all work possible. Please reinstate 3k for all and fund 2-care.

Anca Giurgiulescu

Forest Hills, NY, 11375

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My oldest daughter was born in 2020 and my youngest in 2022. We have benefited so much from having 3k and UPK programs in our community of Forest Hills. Both my husband and I work full time, and we do not have any family nearby, so daycare and preschools are vital to us being able to afford living here. In addition, my oldest daughter has learned so, so much from her 3k and UPK programs and we applied to enroll my younger daughter in 3k for fall 2025 at the same school. We need programming for our children as early as 2 years old for them to grow, socialize, learn and for us to continue to be able to work outside the home and put our skills to use in our professions.

Before the 3k and UPK programs, our kids attended private daycare and we used to pay around \$2000 monthly for under 1 year old and right now we pay \$1150 monthly for our 2 year old's private daycare program. The financial support of NYC early education programs to our family with 2 kids and 2 adults is tremendous. Please do not cut it!



Good afternoon everyone, my name is Andrea Alonso Rodriguez and my pronouns are she/her. I'm in 9th grade and a student at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. I am also a Restorative Justice youth leader at my school! I'm here because I want to let the city know how important restorative justice is in schools and that students want the city to fully fund Restorative Justice, and divest from school police.

While being an RJ youth leader, I've learned better ways to communicate, how to be accountable for my actions, and how to de-escalate conflict within my peers. I have first hand experience in seeing my community at school grow because RJ has given me more confidence to make new and strengthen old relationships. I've noticed in myself that I want to come to school more. It is terrible that the current budget Mayor Adams is proposing would cut funding for restorative justice and important programs like Community Schools and Student Success Centers - while prioritizing school policing and surveillance technologies. This proposal does not feel like it is for us, the students.

Restorative justice supports students instead of just punishing them. It helps address the root causes of behavior, keeps students engaged, and teaches accountability. RJ builds empathy and instead of pushing students behind with suspensions. RJ has given me more direction and I can see how RJ gives my peers tools to succeed and build a better future. I believe that NYC has an opportunity to be a leader in the U.S. by investing in practices that support young people and divesting from practices that criminalize them. More funding for school safety officers does not make us safer. Students demand real safety. I have seen that RJ can keep us safe. It keeps students engaged in their education, reduces repeat offenses, and creates a safer, more supportive school environment and by investing in RJ means investing in the future of our youth and our community. Protect funding for restorative justice in schools. Move money away from hiring and training school police and stop the funding for surveillance technology. By not hiring any more school police right now, NYC could save up to \$100M in one year and that money could fund community-based, sustainable RJ approaches to safety. Thank you for your time.

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**Testimony of Angelina Alshaar
for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: FY 26 Preliminary Budget – Preschool Special Education Services

March 13, 2025

My name is Angelina Alshaar. I live in Queens. I am the parent of Anais. She is my four-year-old daughter, and she has autism. I am here today to talk about the need for the City to provide the preschool special education services that young children need.

My daughter Anais is a preschool student who is non-verbal and was diagnosed with autism. In 2023, I had Anais evaluated for the preschool special education program, and everyone agreed she needed a small special education classroom where she would also receive speech, occupational, and physical therapy and SEIT services. However, the Department of Education (DOE) never provided Anais with her mandated related services for the 2024-2025 school year. I contacted the DOE in the summer of 2024 to request that they provide the compensatory related services but was informed that would not be possible. They also failed to provide me with any information on when those services would begin. It was frustrating to see how the lack of supports and services negatively impacted my child.

It took a full year before Anais was provided with the compensatory related services she was owed for the last school year. Additionally, I briefly experienced the same challenges with getting Anais's mandated related services for this school year and had to send multiple emails to the DOE before those services were put in place. I am still waiting for the DOE to provide additional supports for Anais for this school year. It is upsetting to know that there are many children like my child who spend months or even years waiting for preschool special education services.

Children have a legal right to these services, and the City has an obligation to provide them. That is why I am joining advocates in asking the City to add \$70 million to the City budget for preschool special education services and to continue \$55 million that was added for this year only for preschool special education classes. These funds are necessary to ensure all preschoolers have the special education classrooms and services they need.

Thank you.

Anna Wilkinson

New York, NY 10011

Dear New York City Council,

My name is Anna Wilkinson, and I am a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University studying nutrition and public health. I am writing to you as a native and current New York City citizen who is concerned about the lack of fruit and vegetable intake among our community. Increasing the funding for free Health Bucks will provide individuals with greater opportunities to access nutritious foods, as well as provide community-based organizations with the means to make it easier for families to access affordable, nutritious foods.

As someone who grew up in NYC, I am familiar with the various farmers markets across our city. Yet, many people do not take advantage of them because they cannot afford to buy produce. Having free Health bucks is shown to drive more frequent farmers market visits, which will in turn improve overall health outcomes such as risk for heart disease, obesity, and other chronic illnesses (USDA). However, in 2024 the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene was unable to grant requests to all the 600 applicants to Health Bucks, therefore increasing the funding will improve the ability of the DOHMH to grant access to citizens.

Not only will increasing funding for Health Bucks improve the nutritional status of our citizens, but it will improve the business of local farmers (Baronberg et al., 2013). By providing citizens with an incentive to support local farmers, they are more likely to spend their Health Bucks on produce, and farmers can redeem the Health Bucks for money (NYC.gov). By strengthening our efforts to support the health and economy of our city, we can then go on to make larger changes.

I would like to reiterate that we have an incredible opportunity here to increase the health of our citizens by improving upon this program. Health Bucks has a lot of potential, and I think this is where we can make a significant difference in overall nutrition status and wellbeing of our citizens. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Anna Wilkinson

Health bucks program: Frequently asked questions for ... (n.d.).

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/cdp/health-bucks-farmer-faq.pdf>

Health bucks. SNAP Education Connection. (n.d.).

<https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/library/intervention/health-bucks>

Baronberg, Sabrina & Dunn, Lillian & Nonas, Cathy & Dannefer, Rachel & Sacks, Rachel. (2013). The Impact of New York City's Health Bucks Program on Electronic Benefit Transfer Spending at Farmers Markets, 2006–2009. Preventing chronic disease. 10. E163. 10.5888/pcd10.130113.



Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Anyinel. I am a senior at the Academy for Excellence in Leadership with Make the Road New York and a Youth Leader at our Student Success Center.

As a Youth Leader, I help seniors apply for college and discover their career options. Our Students Success Center in Bushwick was the first to open in the city in 2007 - after Black and brown students designed it and fought for it since the city was not providing their schools with the resources and support needed to go to college. There are now SSCs at close to 40 high schools across the city, helping more than 16,000 students figure out their future. SSCs help support first-generation college students, immigrant students, low-income students, and students of color who, for years, have not gotten the support they need and deserve from the city to support them on the path to college.

The Student Success Center has been transformative and crucial to my personal and academic growth. I discovered the SSC in 2023 and fell in love with the help they offered to my peers applying to CUNY, SUNY, FAFSA, and more, as well as how organized they were with their peers' information. Now, I get to be a part of the experience by attending trainings to educate myself on how to help my peers and myself. It has provided me with a unique opportunity to explore my strengths and interests in ways I never anticipated. Through various workshops, discussions, and one-on-one mentoring sessions, I gained valuable insights into my future and uncovered new dimensions of my potential.

Before discovering the center, I often felt uncertain about my path and overwhelmed by my choices. However, the supportive environment created by caring mentors and engaged peers has made all the difference. They invested their time and energy in my success, fostering a sense of belonging that ignited my aspirations. With their encouragement, I began to set meaningful goals and, most importantly, developed the confidence to pursue them. After graduation, I plan to attend college and study nursing at CUNY.

The nurturing atmosphere of the center allowed me to dig deep into my academic and career interests and push beyond my perceived limits. I explored new opportunities that I had never considered before, and as I faced challenges, I learned to approach them with resilience. The SSC became an essential space for me—where my aspirations were nurtured, where I cultivated my dreams, and where I was empowered to strive for excellence. This journey has shaped my future and equipped me with a desire to contribute positively to my community, inspiring others to pursue their goals just as I have. If we no longer have funding for the SSC, my peers will not have the same support I received with my postsecondary process. **We need the city to commit \$3.3 million this year to support Student Success Centers across the city.** By investing in these centers, you are investing in the futures of thousands of young people throughout New York City. Our schools and communities deserve the same transformative experience I had as a student and a youth leader for years to come. Thank you.



Good afternoon elected officials, peers, and community members. My name is Ava, my pronouns are she/her and I am a youth leader for Sistas and Brothas United at the North West Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and the Urban Youth Collaborative.

I'm a recent high school graduate and I am currently attending Co-op tech which is a DOE operated program. During my high school years I experienced policing in my school as harmful and despite their already being around 12 police there, rarely arrived when there was an incident leading to a teacher/teachers actually supporting to deescalate the situation, the minimal times when school police were involved they had actually escalated situations instead of deescalating them.

One time when an officer was going through my bag they pulled out a pin and started passing it around to their colleagues, making jokes about what the pin said. I felt embarrassed and unwelcomed, imagine that being the first thing that happened to you as you came into school, being bullied by the people principals across NYC and the mayor call on to keep us safe.

It is clear that more police in school wouldn't lessen violence, and oftentimes make students more uncomfortable, suffocated, and criminalized, invading and judging their privacy and private items.

Police being there in general makes the line longer, Even now that I go to Co-op tech they share a building with a DOE school they recently had metal detectors for 2 days in which they usually have none, despite there being over 10 police there that security check made me take 20 minutes longer to get into class one day and on the other day 23 minutes making me late for my class when it usually takes just around 3 minutes to scan my ID and go up the stairs.

It's striking that many DOE principals would share the same message as the mayor to call for more policing in our communities and schools when they should understand that the safest communities are those with the most resources. Violence often stems from underlying issues in someone's life. If we focus on investing in resources that address those issues—such as mental health support, financial assistance (like higher wages and more accessible benefits), housing stability, and medical care—people would have the help they need to cope with life's challenges, reducing the likelihood of violent outcomes. Instead of focusing on controlling individuals whose emotions are escalating, we should address the root causes of their struggles. By providing support that tackles the issues

affecting people's well-being, we could prevent violence and create healthier, safer communities.

It is this committee's responsibility to ensure that young people have fully funded schools free of police, don't add to the many uncertainties students already face because of what is happening at the federal level. We call for the city council to fight for a budget that secures a hiring freeze on school cops. This hiring freeze would not allow the city to fill for attrition. Cut funding for the vacant school cop positions. Use the money from both these divestments to baseline funding for school support staff that schools like mine desperately need. It's time that the City Council stand with students and fight for a budget that funds our *futures*, *not* our criminalization!

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Budget Hearing on Education Programs: March 13,2025
Date: Saturday, March 15, 2025 3:43:36 PM

[REDACTED]

Greetings, my name is Brenda Irizarry and I am a retired New York City Public School Teacher living in the Bronx.

On behalf of Advocates for Children, I would like to make a budget request of \$17.5 million dollars to expand access to

one to one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read.

As a former academic intervention teacher, I was required to do reading and math with grades 2 through 5. Many students

struggled with reading especially fluency, decoding and comprehension. My average group was 6-8 students. Most students

improved but still needed support. The children usually stayed in academic intervention 2-3 years.

Based on the 2024 state reading tests, less than half of students in grades 3 through 8 are at grade level. Therefore, schools need to

improve their intervention programs by having more reading teachers along with training and materials.

In closing, small group or one on one instruction works best with our struggling students. The city should invest and baseline

at least \$17.5 million dollars to help schools deliver one-on-one or small group intervention to more students, who need

extra help with reading.

Thank you.

**Testimony of Brett Saffer for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

FOR THE RECORD

Re: FY 26 Preliminary Budget – Education – Preschool Special Education

March 13, 2025

Good afternoon. My name is Brett Saffer and I am a parent from the Bronx. My daughter Samantha is 3 years old and attends a preschool special education program in our neighborhood. Sammy has Down syndrome and her IEP mandates several different support services.

We have seen the immense benefits of receiving preschool special education services. She's in a wonderful school and has great providers and we have witnessed her growth since the beginning of the school year.

Like so many other families we have experienced gaps in Sammy's services due to the persistent shortage of providers in our city. Just recently our school had to hire a new occupational therapist and it took 2 full months to find a provider with availability, despite the school and the DOE doing everything they can to search for one. That's 2 months that Sammy missed of her mandated OT services.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time that we experienced long gaps in services, between preschool special education and Early Intervention. As a parent it is a terrible feeling to know that your child needs a service but that the city is unable to provide it.

The citywide numbers shared in a recent report from Advocates for Children are extremely upsetting. Thousands of children across the city are not getting the services mandated on their IEP, in some cases for the entire year. This is an outrage.

It is unacceptable and it is ILLEGAL. It should not be this hard to get services in place. I echo the call for the Council and the Mayor to extend the \$55 million that was granted this year for preschool special education, and to add another \$70 million to the City budget for services and evaluations, as recommended by Advocates for Children.

Next Friday March 21st is World Down Syndrome Day. It is a day of inclusion, acceptance, and advocacy. And it is in that spirit that I am here to advocate for all children with disabilities to receive the support services that they are entitled to.

And this council and the mayor will continue to hear from us until that becomes a reality.

Thank you.

March 12, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Hello,

My name is Brita Roy, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like **Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids**, to offer **3K and Universal Pre-K services**.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts. Further, specifically in our Sunset Park community, there are very few sites that have enough DOE slots through 3K and 4K. As such, many parents are forced to move their children to a different school each year during this critical 2-4 years of age range when attachment and trust in caring adults is so important.

Pantomima is seeking approval for their program to include a DOE funded 3K to continue to provide high quality bilingual education to the children in our community. **I am concerned that the roll back of the 3K expansion will prevent this program and other programs like it from continuing to serve our community.**

I have seen firsthand how caring, nurturing, and dedicated the teachers at Pantomima are. They individualize instruction to every child's level and create a safe space to learn, play, and explore. I have had children in the 3K and 4K program – and though very few students are able to attend in those age groups due to cost – the teachers still made sure they met each of my children at their learning level and ensured they were challenged and grew. I am confident that the learning environment would be even more hospitable if more children in that age group could attend.

In this budget season, we ask you to continue to invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services and facilitating licenses to outstanding neighborhood institutions like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brita Roy', with a stylized, flowing script.

Brita Roy
Parent and Advocate

Cara Saunders

[REDACTED]

Brooklyn, NY, 11233

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Paying for childcare is such a huge financial burden for my family. Over half of my paycheck goes to childcare each month. When our child entered 3k it was such a relief and provided so much breathing room. Everyone deserves affordable care for their family.

Our second child would not exist if it wasn't for universal 3k. We were able to consciously space our children 3 years apart because we knew that our 3 year old would be starting 3k. Had this program not existed we would have had to have a 4-5 year age gap between our children because we simply cannot afford two daycare tuitions at the same time. Forever grateful for universal 3k because it allowed me to have my sweet baby!

Carol Magaro

South Ozone Park, NY, 11420

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon. I am the grandmother of a child attending 3-K in Queens. This program, along with 2-Care programs are necessary for working families. Please implement 2-Care funding and restore funding to 3-K and Early Childhood Education Programs for the children of this city. It is clear that the current regime in Washington, despite being the party that calls themselves pro-family, has no intention of funding necessary programs for working families. The vice president's plan is to have grandma and auntie step up and help out in families that can't afford child care. I don't suppose it occurred to him that grandma and auntie must WORK in today's economy. This will only worsen with the poor economic plans being put forth. It is necessary that you show that you are with the people and do everything you can to ensure that these valuable programs are funded.

I am not only the grandmother to a child in a 3-K child in Queens but I currently work as an Early Intervention Therapist with delayed children in Queens. I have had children who have benefited from receiving services that have been able to go into regular 3-K programs which have permitted them to continue to develop and flourish with no additional services. Most of these children would not have qualified for day care and would not have been provided an opportunity to engage with peers and make the advances they did had it not been for the quality 3-K programs they attended. Do not allow these programs to be dismantled!

Caroline Fermin

New York, NY, 10040

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have remained in NYC as an educator, artist, and volunteer for now two decades. My work contributes to the fabric of society here and enriches lives. I want to stay and have my children grow up in this city that I love. However, childcare is making it impossible for me and others like me to stay. We don't have jobs on Wall Street, we don't have family money. We are working class people who are looking to make a life here, and childcare takes almost \$30,000 out of our modest paychecks. We need high quality education for our children, and the city needs families like mine to stay here to raise our families.

I went to school at Juilliard, a widely-recognized cultural icon, and have danced on prestigious stages around the world. But nowhere has my heart more than New York City. There is a diversity to its inhabitants and a creativity that is found nowhere else. I want to raise my children here, but the cost of childcare nearly drove me out of state. Coupled with the high cost of housing, raising a family is out of reach for many like me. It's a shame to see the city bleed talented and dedicated artists and culture-makers, while the population in general declines. So many young adults come to New York for their education or first jobs, inspired by the buzz of the city, and then many leave when the realities of life here hit them. New York should be looking to retain young families like mine. I've lost nearly five different friends to other cities or states because New York was too overwhelming for them during their children's early years. Universal childcare would provide a bridge for families during this crucial time, until their children can enter the public school system. These early years are when many people make the choice to leave. By retaining families during this time, you can ensure they will stay for years beyond.

Chantal Hinds

[REDACTED]

Brooklyn, NY, 11203

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mayor Adams and the City Council must restore and fully fund 3-K and expand childcare to include 2 year olds.

New York City is the greatest city in the world with room and freedom for everyone. But, if our affordability crisis worsens, it will only be for the ultra wealthy. That is not the NYC was born and raised in and not the NYC I want to raise my child in. I want a city that is welcoming to all, including young families. There is nothing wiser and tougher than an NYC kid! The city should do everything possible to ensure that more families can raise their children here.

Amidst the astronomical costs of housing and the increasing costs of groceries, ensuing universal child care is a small step in making this city a safe and welcoming place for families.

A mayor who cuts programs and services for our youngest New Yorkers is not a mayor for all. Funding must be fully restored and expanded for 3K and the city council must start work on expanding universal child care to 2 year olds. The time is now.

I am a mom to a 1 1/2 year old spending about \$1,500 a month on child care. Access to universal child care and living wages for child care workers would make a world of difference in my life and the lives of many New Yorkers.

Testimony Submitted By:
Charlotte Milone, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

New York City City Council
250 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

Dear honorable members of the City Council,

My name is Charlotte, and I am a first year graduate student in the program of Nutrition and Dietetics at Teachers College, Columbia University. With a concentration in Public Health, I cannot stress enough how vital it is that all efforts must be made to support youth through providing nutritious meals and food education, even when school is not in session. This will not only support youth health and development, but also overall education, which is a crucial component of supporting underserved populations whose families lack food security due to ongoing inequitable policies and practices.

I am writing to urge you to consider the importance of the Food Ed Coalition Policy Priorities, and specifically to expand support in their efforts to improve food access and increase Summer nutrition education opportunities through Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support with Food Ed programming. In July 2023, 15.3 children in American public schools received a Summer lunch for every 100 children who received a free or reduced lunch during the previous school year, emphasizing the significant gap in addressing hunger beyond the academic year. Providing food as well as nutrition education through Summer Rising can be a safe haven for many children who lack access to nutritious foods and nutrition education outside of school¹. 1 in 4 NYC children do not know where their next meal will come from, and further child hunger data shows that challenges with food insecurity are exacerbated in the Summer months². Improving upon Summer meal support and Food Ed Hub programming can be a way to bridge the gap in food access for students year round.

In my fieldwork thus far as a graduate student, I have seen directly how impactful nutrition education can be for youth, and how much work needs to be done in terms of expanding these experiences and food access for communities in New York. I recently began working with youth at the Brotherhood/Sisterhood Sol, a nonprofit organization based in the Morningside Heights & Hamilton Heights areas of Manhattan. Even merely having been there for a couple of weeks, I have already learned how impactful their work as a nonprofit is in providing meals and nutrition education for primarily Black and Latinx youth in the community³. 40,000 meals are served to youth members during the school year and Summer, and my preceptor shared with me

¹ *School meals*. NYC Public Schools . (n.d.). <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/food/school-meals>

² *Child hunger data*. City Harvest. (2024, May 16). <https://www.cityharvest.org/child-hunger-data/>

³ *Food Program*. The Brotherhood Sister Sol. (n.d.-b). <https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/programs/food-program/>

how the need is the same, if not more, throughout the Summer months when school is not in session⁴. I think that this highlights the extreme need that exists in further addressing food insecurity in New York City, year round, through nutrition assistance programs backed by adequate funding. Additionally, much of the food education experiences are held throughout the Summer due to accessibility to use of the Bro/Sis community garden and Bro/Sis farmer's market, as well as increased time for experiences. I believe that this example of nutrition education programming demonstrates how ideal it is to increase implementation of Food Ed Hub programming during the Summer. Therefore, I urge you to expand the current Summer meal support and nutrition education services with these enhancements:

1. Increase overall funding for Summer meals and nutrition education, as it is clear that the needs are not being fully met.
2. Improve upon logistical challenges with providing meals during Summer Rising programming. For example, oftentimes meals are missed if provided at the end of the day. If meals are provided a period before the students leave, they are more likely to eat them and are less likely to go home hungry for an amount of food beyond what their household can provide.
3. Expand upon the nutrition education implemented in the Summer Rising program, making them multidimensional, to instill sustainable healthy habits and knowledge surrounding food and nutrition⁵.

In conclusion, it is evident that Summer meal services and nutrition education play a crucial part in maintaining any steps made during the academic year towards supporting consistent food security and encouraging healthy eating. Expanding this programming has clear benefits in addressing health disparities that exist as a result of poor food access and limited nutrition knowledge due to various inequities. Improving this programming will not only better address food insecurity, but it will also improve academic performance and reduce susceptibility to diet related disease⁶. I urge you to support the expansion for Summer meal support and nutrition education at Summer Rising programs, as these are vital for supporting the education, health, and wellbeing of our future generation.

Sincerely,
Charlotte Milone

[Redacted Signature]

⁴ *Food Program*. The Brotherhood Sister Sol. (n.d.-b). <https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/programs/food-program/>

⁵ Chaudhary, A., Sudzina, F., & Mikkelsen, B. E. (2020). Promoting healthy eating among young people—a review of the evidence of the impact of school-based interventions. *Nutrients*, 12(9), 2894. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12092894>

⁶ Orovecz, K., Pincus, E., Todd, N., & Welch, M. (2015). *No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices*. Summer Nutrition Program Social Impact Analysis. <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/summer-nutrition-program-social-impact-analysis>

Christine Lisa-Lamb

[REDACTED]

New York, NY, 10040

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Our full-time daycare costs \$26,000 per year. My husband and I have lived in NYC for 16 years and we want to raise our son here. But the cost of living and childcare means we may need to move closer to family who can help with childcare. Implementing 2-Care would be life-changing! We would be able to save money towards purchasing a home in the city we love so much.

Our son is almost 9 months old. We live in Fort George in Upper Manhattan and absolutely love our neighborhood. It's the first time I've truly felt like I was part of a community here in NYC. It feels like a small town up here. The families are friendly, kind, and helpful. We want to continue living here and contributing to this wonderful neighborhood.

March 11, 2025

Re: PANTOMIMA: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Cindy McNamara, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to preschools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Preschools like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families struggle to afford private preschools, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is seeking approval for their program to include a DOE funded 3K to continue to provide high quality bilingual education to the children in our community. I am concerned that the roll back of the 3K expansion will prevent this program and other programs like it from continuing to serve our community.

Pantomima is a special, well-known institution in Sunset Park, South Brooklyn. We actually commute each day from Dyker Heights to Sunset Park so our son Finnian can spend the day at Pantomima with his amigos - learning ABCs, 123s, words, feelings, socializing, having fun outdoors, making arts and crafts, and playing theater. Finnian, who started at Pantomima at 20 months old and is now 3 years old, is bilingual in Spanish and English, despite no native Spanish speakers at home - a superb example of the high quality of early childhood education Pantomima provides. Every single educator and caregiver I know at Pantomima is warm, caring, nurturing and loving. It's our son's home away from home and is our family. This is truly an environment where we want our children to thrive in their formative early years to set a solid foundation and pathway to success to grow into future leaders in the world.

In this budget season, we ask you to continue to invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services and facilitating licenses to beloved neighborhood institutions like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Cindy McNamara
Parent and Advocate

Colin Maxwell

[REDACTED]

Bronx, NY, 10470

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My wife and I have never been able to afford market-rate childcare in NYC. We were forced to balance our schedules every week until thankfully universal 3k went into effect just as our oldest turned 3. Our marriage was strained. Our lives were nothing but childcare and work.

If we had access to universal 2-care my wife could have begun her nursing degree a year earlier. She would already have a degree and be working as a nurse right here in the Bronx.

Make this a possibility for others!

March 3, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Danielle Aronson-Wang, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk.

Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Danielle Aronson-Wang
Parent, Advocate, and NYC DOE Teacher



Good afternoon, elected officials, peers, and community members. My name is Darialis, my pronouns are she/her and I am a youth leader in Sistas and Brothas United at the North West Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and the Urban Youth Collaborative.

I would like to start by sharing a story about my sister, who was a paraprofessional in my school. She was not just a para but a mentor, a listener, and a person who was always there for students who needed her. She helped so many students, including me. She would talk with us when things were difficult, help us through school problems, and be there for us emotionally when things at home or in our personal lives were rough. But despite all the wonderful things she did to assist students, she was laid off due to budget cuts. However, the budget cuts did not affect the police officers in the school—those positions were retained. I know that having her presence made such a huge difference in my life and in the lives of so many other students. We needed her, and we still need her. If we can afford police in schools, we should be able to afford more staff who actually work with students in a way that builds trust, community, and emotional resilience. My sister, like so many other paraeducators, was part of a team that made students feel safe, supported, and heard. But instead of more people like her, we got more police. That is not the kind of safety that helps us grow.

My school only has one counselor per grade, and with over 1,000 students, that creates an impossible workload. It is nearly impossible to get an appointment with a counselor, and when we finally do, it is last minute and unfocused. We need to talk about our problems, whether they are academic troubles, home troubles, or mental health crises—but how are we supposed to get the help that we need when the demand is this high and the resources are this low? The counselors are supposed to be there for the students, but the reality is, we barely get to see them. The scheduling system at our school is always backed up because of the number of students who need assistance. It is impossible to receive help for the specific problems we are experiencing when there is simply not enough time or staff to help us. Consider how many additional students could excel and feel noticed if we had a counselor for every 100 or 200 students, rather

than one for over 300. It's simple: students can't succeed if we don't have the mental health resources and support that we need. We should not be made to wait for weeks to speak with a counselor when daily there are crises taking place in the life of a student.

Lastly, I would like to speak about my former school, which was a fashion school. It is a school where creativity and self-expression is valued, and students wear jewelry, various apparel, and accessories as part of who they are. We had to go through metal detectors every morning when we entered the school which made it difficult for students who wore jewelry to get to class. Some students were forced to discard their jewelry, while others were delayed at the metal detectors because they had something on that wasn't "approved," which slowed their entry into class. The constant feeling of being monitored contributed to the anxiety and tension. It felt like the focus was on policing students rather than allowing us to learn and express ourselves. These metal detectors weren't safe; they were simply creating more barriers for students to function within a school setting. What I'm really asking for is a budget that invests in students' mental health and well-being. We don't need more police officers in schools. We need more counselors, more paraprofessionals, and more staff who will actually listen, advise us, and give us the emotional and academic support we need to succeed.

We do not need supervision and surveillance. We need trust, counseling, and resources that will enable students to become healthy, solid, and well-rounded human beings.

City council has a responsibility to fight for a budget that will support young people like me and my peers. The best way to do this is by

- 1) securing a hiring freeze on school cops that does not allow to fill for attrition
- 2) cut funding for the remaining vacant school cop positions
- 3) use the funding from both these divestments to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive.

Delisa Randall

Brooklyn, NY, 11201

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Investing in early childhood is essential to the development and betterment of our future and the family unit. No parent should have to question if they can financially afford to extend their families or have one at all because it's extremely expensive. When I decides to have my daughter it wasn't even a thought but when the time came it was a financial burden that all I could afford was rent and childcare. I had to take out loans to afford child care from ages 6 months and 4 years old. And even now it's still difficult. I struggled to be a contributor to the nyc framework as an educator with a masters degree. No one should have to choose. It cost me over \$50,000 to have childcare over the first four years of my child's life. We need to bridge the gap between early childhood and public school to invest in our future generations. And take the burden off families who genuinely want to build a better nyc. We are asking for an essential need and right as taxpayers.

The high cost of child care impacted my life as I had to choose between work and continue my education career or take care of my newborn daughter in 2017. I need to further my education to support my family as a single parent. So I ended up having to take out loans that seven years I'm still paying off in order to play for child care. There were no agencies at the time to really support furthering my life and support the family dynamics. Knowing the struggle to build a family in nyc has lead to be not have anymore children because I fear to take on that financially burden even though I desire to extend my family. As an early childhood, families not having access to affordable education is distasteful in a city that claims to support and build the family. Community and cities are founded by the family unit! If we do support them to economically and socially advance by providing safe and high quality child care to build our future adulthood. It tell me and the residents of our city that no one cares! We need to invest in the minds and hearts of our future generations, the stability of our adults and the growth of our city to better a better and greater NYC.

Diptesh Soni

Brooklyn, NY, 11218

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mayor Adams - you are a pretty awful mayor, and I could say that confidently even before you sold New Yorkers down the river to trump. Do something not shit for once and help working families stay and thrive in the city with 3k and 2-care. It's probably the least you can do to salvage what is rapidly becoming a truly dogshit legacy. Eid Mubarak, assuming you will be celebrating with your Turkish brethren.

I am unemployed and am very eager to have some costs alleviated through 3k. I certainly think 2care could have been very useful too.



Testimony of Djeneba Toure, 12th grade student:

Good afternoon, esteemed members of city council, my name is Djeneba Toure, I am a 12th grade student at The Global Learning Collaborative.

As a student growing up in the Bronx, I've had to navigate multiple identities—code-switching from African to Black to a less "ethnic tone," and even adjusting my speech and mannerisms to fit into different spaces. But one thing that remained constant was the lack of representation of my history in my education today. Thus, I am advocating for the inclusion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and a mandatory African American history course in all NYC public schools.

New York City is one of the most diverse places in the world, yet our curriculum tells an incomplete version of American history. African American history is often reduced to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, failing to recognize the full scope of Black contributions, struggles, and achievements. Without this knowledge, students are left unprepared to understand the racial inequalities that still shape our society.

Having to be the one to mention the São João Bautista ship that carried human cargo from Angola to being the only one who understood the history of the nation of Liberia. I remember sitting in history class, learning about the Founding Fathers and the Constitution, yet hearing only brief mentions of slavery, as if Black history began and ended with oppression. No one talked about the countless Black inventors, scholars, and activists beyond Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. That gap in knowledge leaves students like me searching for our own history outside of the classroom.

Critical Race Theory is not about division—it's about education. It equips students with the critical thinking skills to examine history, law, and social structures, helping them understand how race has shaped our institutions.

To make this possible, we need funding for teacher training, updated curriculum materials, and community partnerships. This is not just about funding education—it's about funding truth.

We cannot call ourselves an educated society if we are not willing to teach the full truth. Representation in history is not a privilege—it is a right. If we truly want to prepare students to be leaders, decision-makers, and changemakers, we need to equip them with knowledge that reflects the realities of the world they live in. The fight for racial justice starts in the classroom. Let's make it happen. Thank you.

Emerson Hilgenfeldt
MS-RDN Candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University

Support for Strengthening and Expanding Food and Nutrition Education in NYC
March 12th, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee

My name is Emerson Hilgenfeldt and I am a graduate student studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to you, because I am concerned that New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) needs to strengthen and expand their nutrition education, as this is detrimental to students' health and wellness.

I am writing to express my support for strengthening and expanding food and nutrition education in NYCPS. Currently only 190 of the 1,800 NYCPS have access to food education grants. Additional funding will increase the food education programs in NYCPS, which will help students and their communities overall health and well-being. "Nutrition education has a 'huge opportunity' to change poor health outcomes such as obesity" (Food and Nutrition Board, 2013). To mitigate chronic diseases it is vital to educate children at a young age. Renewing the funding for the Food Ed Hub would strengthen the collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education in all communities. Providing aid to this network will help students especially from low-income families, insecure households, and single-parent homes to receive nutrition education, which will lead to better health outcomes.

An outside consultant will be used to develop a strategic framework for these funds. This plan would take into account the goals of the Food Ed Community Based Organisations (CBOs), and create a plan to advance NYC strategic goals of supporting food and housing to insure low-income residents without mainly relying on the NYC City Council Funding. This approach will improve nutrition security, especially for students in NYCPS.

"The CDC reports that six out of ten American adults have at least one chronic disease, including cancer, heart disease, and diabetes" (Graber, 2022). There is a chronic disease epidemic, and lifestyle factors such as poor diet and lack of exercise are the leading contributors to these incidences. Consuming a nutritionally dense diet is especially vital for children as they're still developing. According to the CDC an overall healthy student performs better academically, has higher cognitive skills, and a better attitude. In order to enhance the health and wellness of children it is critical to increase the funding for Food Ed programming in NYCPS. A minimal amount of NYCPS have access to Food Ed grants, which is inhibiting children from learning about food education. In order to reduce chronic disease rates and enhance academic performance in children, we must begin to educate children at a young age. Increasing the funds for these programs can help an additional 100 schools, students in all communities, and provide professional development opportunities for staff.

A part of Food Ed organizations in NYCPS initiative, is that 100 established CBOs would receive \$25,000 grants to expand their reach and serve more schools. These grants would build capacity by allowing CBOs to hire more staff, purchasing new equipment, and developing a new

curriculum. Investing in a diverse range of organizations, can help aid in culturally relevant, high quality food and nutrition education in NYC. It is imperative that students have access to these critical programs, as they also help NYC's most vulnerable communities such as those with a low socioeconomic status. Lastly, investing in program evaluation will help CBOs measure the effectiveness and impact of Food Ed programs. This will help monitor and enhance these programs, as it is important for children to be receiving the most superb nutrition education.

Ultimately, strengthening and expanding Food Ed in NYC can help children's overall health and well-being, as this is vital for their academic performance and can mitigate chronic diseases. These programs directly impact all communities, even NYC most vulnerable. This funding will be used to spread nutrition education, enhance Food Ed programming, create a program evaluation, and more. As a resident of NYC and a future registered dietitian I am concerned about our current health trajectory. I believe implementation of this expansion can truly help children's overall health. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and I hope you take this into consideration. I hope that you all will support the strengthening and expanding food and nutrition education in NYCPS.

Sincerely,
Emerson Hilgenfeldt

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Hello everyone, my name is Emily Lin and I'm a current student at Bronx Science. The United States is a nation of hopes and dreams. It's a nation of opportunity and prosperity. However, lately, more than ever America has felt like it's been a nation of discrimination and division. Often described as a "melting pot", the United States is a country that strives towards equality in rights, beliefs, and opportunity. Despite how times are now, the people of our country are all brought together with that hope of betterment, that hope of success, and to be able to attain those opportunities that America boasts about, one needs to receive the proper education to be able to fully utilize their environment and resources. We need to be taught to think critically, to be resourceful, and to succeed. Shrinking the Department of Education to nearly half its size, is truthfully disturbing.

Mayor Adams is proposing devastating budget cuts to education—cuts that will strip resources from our students, our teachers, and our schools. This is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it is about the future of our children and the very foundation of our city. Education is not a luxury—it is a right. A well-funded education system provides students with the tools to succeed, fosters innovation, and strengthens our economy. Yet, instead of investing in our schools, the Mayor continues to prioritize corporations and policing over education. These budget cuts will mean fewer teachers, reduced arts programs, and limited mental health support for students—at a time when they need it most.

The Trump administration is enlarging the ever widening difference between the 1% and the working class by stripping young people of their potential and resources. When framing this country, our founding fathers purposely implemented a republican system of government because they felt as if the opinions of those who were uneducated were invalid. Through education, the people of this country take responsibility and control of how the country operates, by choosing or becoming qualified individuals who get voted into their positions. By stripping the DOE of nearly half its resources, the Trump administration is essentially pushing for an aristocratic and authoritarian society. A nation where the people are too ignorant about anything that is going on. Being educated is our way of fighting against oppression. It's our way of standing up and taking control of our lives and our country. The world doesn't need anymore ignorant bystanders.

We need to progress as a nation; we need to develop; we need to innovate. And, education is the key for advancement. We as the people of a nation have the responsibility to cultivate and maintain it, so our children and the next generations after them can live in a world where they are genuinely taught to think, so they are able to succeed. The one thing that we must remember is that the future is in the hands of the younger generation, and to progress forward, we must not cut the education budget. Thank you.

Emma Laudisi, MS-RDN Candidate

Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony Letter to The New York City Council Committee on Education

New York City Hall Legislative Office Building

250 Broadway, Suite 1752

New York, NY 10007

13 March 2025

Dear Honorable Rita C. Joseph, Chair,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Emma Laudisi and I am a graduate student studying Nutrition Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, with the goal of becoming a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. I am writing to express my deep concern about food and nutrition security among New York City (NYC) students. Summer Rising offers vital academic and enrichment programming to students during the summer, but with a few key modifications, I believe this program could have an even greater impact, especially for children from food-insecure families.

During the school year, many families rely on meal programs to ensure their children receive nutritious meals. However, when schools close for the summer, many students lose access to these essential meals, increasing the challenges of food insecurity. According to research from the Laurie M. Tisch Food Center for Food, Education & Policy, in 2020, over 1 in 10 households in NYC were food-insecure, and households with children faced even higher risks. Without adequate food and nutrition, children perform more poorly in school, struggle with mental health, and are at a greater risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and anemia (Mowszowski, 2023). During summer breaks, however, the absence of consistent access to school meals exacerbates health and wellness challenges, specifically for NYC children of low-income households.

To maximize Summer Rising effectiveness, I propose that we require a structured meal period before dismissal or to ensure that meals are served prior to educational instruction. This adjustment would allow children to benefit from both nutrition and educational experiences without the disruptions that may occur when mealtime is disconnected from their learning activities. Studies show that hunger negatively impacts a child's ability to learn, while eating healthy meals supports better academic performance and improves social skills (No Kid Hungry, 2023). Having meals and lessons together also helps to teach the importance of eating well and understanding food.

To address this issue, I propose the following improvements to Summer Rising:

- **Expand Funding for Summer Rising:** Allocate additional resources to ensure the program can accommodate all students in need, providing consistent access to nutritious meals throughout the summer.
- **Ensure Structured Meal Periods:** Require a structured meal period before dismissal or ensure meals are served before educational activities. This would help students get the nutrition they need while also supporting their learning.
- **Expand Food Education Components:** Incorporate comprehensive food education programs, like the Tisch Food Center's Food Education Hub. With the Food Ed Hub offering hands-on activities such as cooking demonstrations and gardening projects, students can continue to learn throughout the summer about nutrition and foster healthy eating habits.

By integrating these changes, we can ensure that students, particularly those from food-insecure families, continue to have access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round. These enhancements would not only meet their immediate needs but also provide them with the knowledge to make healthier choices throughout their lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I look forward to your support in strengthening the Summer Rising program to benefit all students in New York City.

Sincerely,

Emma Laudisi, MS-RDN Candidate

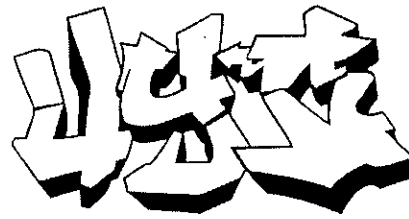
Teachers College, Columbia University



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Urban Youth Collaborative



Hello my name is Esther. My pronouns are she/her and I'm in 10th grade. I'm a youth leader with Make the Road New York and Urban Youth Collaborative. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand up for my community and talk about key problems and solutions.

As of right now in my school there is only 1 guidance counselor. Even then my guidance counselor is still busy with the other 500 students in my high school and I can never find time to speak to her 1 on 1. That one guidance counselor is away on parental leave and someone is filling in for her. They are building connections with students and helping them but as soon as the actual counselor comes back that connection is gone. If we had more than 1 guidance counselor this wouldn't be such an issue because there would be other people ready to fill in her role.

Our Mayor has not prioritized our mental health, he has threatened to cut money from important resources. Some key resources needed for students that are being threatened is the mental health continuum, student success centers, restorative justice and community schools. We urgently need police free schools to protect the immigrant students and their families from deportation.

Just last week there were confirmed reports of ICE trucks outside of one of the high schools in Port Richmond. Youth were uncomfortable and full of anxiety. This is how impacted young people are at the mere presence of their vehicles. A couple of weeks before that, one of our youth members experienced ICE banging on their door repeatedly. They were not looking for them but their aggressive presence made the rest of our peers feel fearful. The other day one of my peers sent a photo of a police officer with a jacket that she said had "ICE" on it and when he turned around she realized the design on the coat split the word "Police" in the middle. This is our reality, one that many young people across the country have to navigate through. If New York divested from all forms of policing and disciplinary practices, there wouldn't be such a high risk for immigrants to get deported. We need to redirect those funds into systems that create a safe and supportive environment for the students, where they actually belong.

A prime example of restorative practice is peer mediation. Peer mediation is a resource we are lucky to have in our school. I happen to be a part of this program and get to facilitate mediations. Before I became a facilitator, I was once a part of a mediation as well. There was a conflict between me and a student about untrue rumors and miscommunication. A dean guided us to the

mediation center where we got to hear each other's side of the story. This happened a year ago, I haven't had any problems with this student since. This is an important example to show peer mediation and restorative justice is helpful in schools and helps keep students from getting into fights. It hurts to see not enough schools in New York have this key resource.

What the students really need is for elected officials to listen to all voices and remove police from school and invest and expand the staff and practices that truly keep us safe. We demand that the city and Mayor prioritize the students by 1- stop hiring any new school cops immediately, 2- cut funding for the remaining hundreds of vacant school cop positions. And 3- use that funding of 100 million dollars to protect and expand RJ, mental health, and other practices that help students thrive.

More than ever we need our Mayor to listen to student voices and divest the funding from the policing division into resources that actually let students succeed in their environment.

BROOKLYN 301 GROVE STREET BROOKLYN, NY 11237 TEL: 718 418 7690 FAX: 718 418 9635	QUEENS 92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372 TEL: 718 565 8500 FAX: 718 565 0646	STATEN ISLAND 161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302 TEL: 718 727 1222 FAX: 718 981 8077	LONG ISLAND 1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE BRENTWOOD, NY 11717 TEL: 631 231 2220 FAX: 631 231 2229	WESTCHESTER 46 WALLER AVENUE WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605 TEL: 914 948 8466 FAX: 914 948 0311
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WWW.MAKETHEROADNY.ORG

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/13/25

Testimony submitted by:
Faith Catherine Jones
CFA Fellow, Community Food Advocates
[REDACTED]

Chair Joseph, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service.*

My name is Faith Catherine Jones and I am a senior at Brooklyn Technical High School. I work as a CFA Fellow at Community Food Advocates. I work with the Youth Food Advocates (YFA) as a youth mentor and assist the YFA interns throughout the school year on food advocacy initiatives.

YFA is a youth-led organization that prioritizes improvements to the lunch experience in schools. Youth Food Advocates consist of students from across NYC in numerous high schools coming together to become student representatives to voice students' opinions in NYC. We emphasize the need for youth voices, as many times we see that one of the main stakeholders impacted at school lunch, usually doesn't have a seat in the conversation when discussing improvements, and we hope to see that change in the future.

The Tisch Food Center & Food Ed Coalition has been an extremely helpful partner over the years in helping YFA reach its goals. They were part of the first presentation of the YFA School Meal Report and gave us a lot of feedback and input that helped us improve our report. We are greatly appreciative of their help, as we went on to officially share the report and presentation with the Office of Food and Nutrition Services, the deputy chancellor, and Chair Rita Joseph.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to strengthen Food Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing Food Ed programs & partner supports.

YFA views Food Ed in NYC as a crucial partner in our work to share suggestions for changes to NYC school lunches. We hope to have their continued support in the future as we pursue new goals and initiatives within the cafeteria space.

- Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households (\$250,000).
- Developing a strategic framework with an outside consultant will advance the coalition's growth while aligning with the goals of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to improve nutrition security in NYC Public Schools (\$100,000).
- Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 190 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support, and additional resources will allow more students to benefit (\$3 million).

- Establishing a Speaker's Initiative will facilitate targeted funding for 100 CBOs, enabling them to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula, ultimately ensuring access to high-quality nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable students (\$2.5 million).
- Investing in a consistent evaluation methodology for CBOs can inform the community and council of the value and areas for improvement in food ed programming (\$100,000).

We also urge the council to improve NYC nutrition security by strengthening the understanding of key food initiatives and ensuring the development of inclusive and transparent standards for Food Ed.

- We amplify community voices in assessing and improving key food initiatives like Plant-Powered Fridays to foster greater food and nutrition security across NYC. This initiative will also enhance CUNY's Food Justice Leadership Fellowship by training diverse undergraduate students to advocate for community-based food policies (\$499,878).
- A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce will evaluate career pathways, wages, and professional development opportunities (We request that the Comptroller's Office conduct this study).
- It is essential to develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million). Additionally, CBOs should be compensated for their expertise in co-creating standards, and professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).

We implore the council to expand food access and summer nutrition opportunities.

As a member of the Youth Food Advocates, we have discussed the need and importance of summer meals. We understand that some students during the school year may have their only meal of the day in school or are unable to purchase lunches due to financial constraints. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of summer meals, to ensure that those students are never without access to healthy meals even when school is out.

- Expanding support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support programs will enhance food access and education for students when school is out, ensuring they receive nutritious meals and hands-on food experiences. To maximize the program's effectiveness, it is crucial to incorporate a meal period before dismissal, particularly for those from food-insecure families who rely on summer meals as their primary source of nutrition.
- Increasing funding for free Health Bucks would further expand access to fresh food for families by simplifying the application process and allowing community-based organizations (CBOs) to partner with schools more effectively. This funding would address the high demand seen in 2024, where numerous applications for Health Bucks went unfunded, thereby ensuring local CBOs can better serve their communities.

Thank you for your time,

Faith Catherine Jones

Gabriella Montinola



New York, New York 10019



March 12, 2025

Support for Food Education and Nutrition Security

Dear Honorable Members of the New York City Council Committee on Education,

My name is Gabriella Montinola and I am a graduate student studying nutrition in Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to urge your support in expanding food access and summer nutrition opportunities for students in New York City.

Up to 44 million people are food insecure in the United States (Feeding America, 2021). Food insecurity is a pervasive issue in the United States and disproportionately affects low-income families and communities of color. Furthermore, many students face insecurity with 30.1 million students qualifying for and receiving a free or reduced-price lunch in 2022 (USAFacts Team, 2023). It is imperative to create opportunities for everyone to have access to food year-round. For students whose families often rely on the meals provided in schools, this includes summer months so their children can receive the nourishment they need to grow and thrive.

To add a personal anecdote, I used to work in an education non-profit that helped children from low-income families learn how to read and do basic numeracy. While our literacy and numeracy programs were generally a great success in building such critical skills, it pains me to report that some children were unable to finish the programs because of issues relating to insufficient food. Clearly, food access is a fundamental need that must be prioritized.

To address this issue I would like to advocate for the following actions:

1. Strengthen and Expand the Summer Rising Program with Mandatory Meal Periods
 - a. The Summer Rising program has been shown to be instrumental in allowing students to continue receiving nutritious meals and food-education experience. To maximize the program's impact, meals should be required before dismissal to ensure more consistent access to health food and education throughout the summer.
2. Increase funding for Health Bucks
 - a. Health bucks provides low-income families including communities of color with greater access to fresh produce, ultimately reducing food insecurity. Increased funding is needed as in 2024, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene as

600 applications requesting for Health Bucks were unmet. I would also like to recommend simplifying the Health Bucks application form to make it easier for children and families to access affordable and healthy food.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my written testimony and for your dedication to improving food access and nutrition for New York City. By supporting food education and nutrition security the New York City council can take a significant step in mitigating the issue of food insecurity and set up our communities for success.

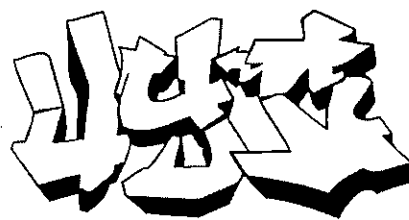
Sincerely,
Gabriella Montinola
Teachers College, Columbia University

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Urban Youth Collaborative



Hello. My name is Holiday, and my pronouns are she/her. I'm a senior at a community school in Brooklyn and youth leader with Make the Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative. I'm here today, because our Mayor has failed us throughout his entire administration by investing in the wrong things. Also, Mayor Adams and the Federal Government keep saying that they will cooperate with law enforcement to deport immigrants that have committed crimes. This makes us worried about how schools can criminalize students by having school police respond to conflict happening in schools, using surveillance or harsh discipline policies instead of using proven alternatives like restorative justice and mental health support. Instead of truly supporting students and listening to us, the Mayor continues to criminalize us by cutting funding from vital resources.

I have been searched multiple times while going through the scanning. And for what? I followed every rule and did nothing wrong, but the system was designed to make me feel like I had. One time, I was pulled aside by a school cop and felt very nervous and embarrassed as I was the center of that moment. School should be a safe environment for ALL students. The embarrassment I went through is something that no young person should go through. We deserve to be treated with respect and dignity!

We don't need metal detectors, random searches, or school cops treating us like criminals. We need more restorative programs, Student Success Centers for college and career planning, and job opportunities in school to build skills.

I have experienced it myself, counseling and sports have kept me grounded and healthy in high school. When it comes to college, I'm on my own. Being a senior is tough and applying for college is even harder. The youth leaders and counselors at the student success center help us navigate financial aid, but we will lose that support if funding is cut. FAFSA and TAP are confusing and without guidance we are stuck. I feel the pressure daily because failure is not an option when my future depends on getting it right the first time. Without these resources, seniors will be left to fend for themselves and lose essential support. We need these funds to give students a welcoming place to focus and succeed.

Also, this week, the U.S. Education Department laid off nearly 50% of its workforce, something that shouldn't come as a surprise. We all know President Trump's appointment of Linda McMahon is part of his plan to dismantle the education department. What students like me need right now is for the NYC Council to step up to protect us and our education.

School is a place where all young people should be free to learn, grow from mistakes, explore new interests, and be safe. There is no proof that school police prevent conflict in our schools. In fact, we have seen them mostly escalate any conflict that does happen—making things worse

and reinforcing the school to prison/deportation pipeline. Neither the Police nor ICE have a place in our school buildings. We deserve better. We need opportunities, not intimidation. We need support. In conclusion, we demand cuts to police funding in schools, vacant school cop positions, and redirect that money to restorative programs and the resources that help succeed.

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Iorysiella Kongguasa

Teachers College at Columbia University

New York, New York 10027

March 10, 2025

New York City Council

New York City Hall

City Hall Park, New York, New York 10007

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

I am Iorysiella Kongguasa, a graduate student of Teachers College, Columbia University majoring in Nutrition Education. Having spent a significant amount of time working for the food service industry, it has been quite clear and concerning to me that we still have a lot to improve on the city's food and nutrition security, especially for those working in the food industry themselves. Therefore, I would like to encourage a more robust implementation of Food Ed Coalition Policy Priorities 2026 on Food Initiatives and Investments.

New York State's Department of Labor recorded that the minimum cash wage for NYC's food service employees is \$11.00, while the minimum wage for NYC in general, as of January 1, 2025, is \$16.5. Although it is listed that the "hourly tip credit" is supposed to be \$5.50 for these food service workers, considering the at-will nature of customer tips, it does not sound fair that food service workers' day-to-day survivability is uncertain and very much dependent on whether their customers are happy enough with their work to give them additional credits. New York City is one of the most expensive cities in the nation to live in. Making ends

meet with minimum-wage income is barely possible in the current economy, especially in New York City.

This phenomenon is not just all numbers. I have worked in the food service industry for around 3 years and made a new family in the kitchen. I vividly remembered how everything in the food service operations is dynamic, except for being underpaid and understaffed. There were barely Caucasians; most of our food service workers are minorities, usually with big families to support. They barely got a percent increase in wages when they have to face a four-percent increase of living costs due to inflation. When minimum wage is barely enough to support a person, how can it be normal to expect a breadwinner to be capable of supporting their family with below-minimum-wage income?

Hence, I would like to strongly advocate for the wellbeing enhancement of my fellow food service workers by urging the government to consider:

1. Raising minimum wage (no tips included in the calculation) for all food service workers, both front-of-house and back-of house, to at least \$16.5 (NYC minimum wage).
2. Providing subsidy and its related regulation for establishments owners who are not capable yet of paying minimum wage of \$16.50 to their workers when they really need the workforce.
3. Setting a limit to overtime hours to prevent over-overtime.
4. Well-rounded training and education programs for all food service workers across the nation, tailored to each of their interest, aspiration, and need.

Food service industry is one of the gigantic industries that keep this country running. I believe that it is just fair that we intentionally invest more resources in

maintaining the well-being of those that do most of the work to keep the industry running.

Yours Sincerely,

Iorysiella Kongguasa

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The Effects of the of the New York City Minimum Wage Increases on Earnings, Poverty, and Material Hardship: Evidence from the Poverty Tracker | Center on Poverty and Social Policy. (2016). Columbia.edu. <https://povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/2023/nyc-poverty-tracker-minimum-wage-increases>

February 10, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Ivy Anderson and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community as well as a high school social worker at Sunset Park High School. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent and a local social worker, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive.

Since September 2024, Pantomima has served as my toddler's home away from home. I was very nervous about sending my toddler to daycare, however the directors and educators at Pantomima supported my son's transition to the classroom with care, collaboration and communication. I was very quickly put at ease and have since developed a high level of trust in the staff of Pantomima and feel aligned with the approach of the institution. It would greatly benefit the community to expand their reach in the community.

Since my child's transition to daycare in September 2024, I have been so impressed with the super high energy of my son's teachers, the meaningful activities and themes of the classroom activities, and the care and interest they provide to each individual child. Moreover, Pantomima is a vital piece of the Sunset Park community, hosting donation events for recently arrived immigrants, Thanksgiving food and diaper drives and more.

Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts. I will be heartbroken when/if my son has to leave Pantomima because it does not become a 3K and Universal Pre-K site, and I cannot afford to send him. Please fund Pantomima so it can continue to provide high quality early education at an affordable cost for local members of the community.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Ivy Anderson, LMSW
Parent, Advocate, Sunset Park HS Social Worker

Jasmine Guarin, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W 120th Street,
New York, New York 10027

March 12, 2025
New York City Council
New York City Hall
City Hall Park,
New York, New York 10007

Dear New York City Council,

My name is Jasmine Guarin and I am a graduate student studying Nutrition Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to you as a concerned citizen, future professional in the field of nutrition and dietetics, and an advocate for food equity. My past experiences as someone living in a low-income and food insecure household has led me to engage in the meaningful work of improving access to fresh and healthy food options for those who are part of marginalized and/or underserved communities. It is our responsibility as advocates and leaders to heed to the needs of our neighbors, particularly ensuring access to nutritious foods in order to meet dietary guidelines and pursue healthful lives.

It is imperative that funding for free Health Bucks is increased in order to expand access to fresh, healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, to low-income families across New York City. Before diving into the urgent need for this change, it is important to first understand what is causing New York City residents to have limited access to or inability to attain adequate amounts of food. It is critical to note the high poverty rates within New York City (23%), which is nearly twice the national average (New York City Council, 2022). These rates ultimately affect the nutrition and well-being of communities, especially their ability to acquire and afford whole foods that will allow them to not only meet dietary guidelines, but ensure the health of themselves, their families, and future generations. Along with poverty rates, a large percentage of city residents, approximately 1.2 million individuals (14.6%), are battling food insecurity, where their ability to purchase and consume nutritious and adequate amounts of food is compromised (New York City Council, 2022).

Studies have shown that participation in SNAP has reduced food insecurity for household with limited resources (e.g., low-income and/or disabled) to purchase adequate amounts of food, but this has proven to be effective mainly for those facing very low food security (i.e., disrupted eating patterns and/or decreased/no food intake) (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2024). Although many city residents receive SNAP benefits (20%) (New York City Council, 2022), it often falls short in providing enough resources for households to follow a healthy diet and meet nutritional standards (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2024). The rise in food prices and the decrease in SNAP benefits have caused families to resort to consuming higher amounts of cheaper processed foods, high in fats and added sugars, and lower amounts of expensive whole foods, such as fruits and vegetables (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2024). These dietary shifts put individuals at risk for developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension (e.g., high blood pressure) (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2024). This diminishes the long-term health of communities and the city as a whole (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2024).

New York City has made incredible strides in improving food accessibility and decreasing food insecurity rates since the pandemic (Baronberg et al., 2013). The city's abundance of farmers markets is just one example of these advancements. These farmers markets have not only had numerous positive economic effects, including boosting and supporting small businesses and

farmers, but has also had a profound social impact, such as enhancing accessibility and affordability of fresh produce, prompting community engagement, providing educational opportunities, and so much more (Baronberg et al., 2013). Health Bucks has extended the opportunity for SNAP recipients to participate in farmers markets and has encouraged these low-income shoppers to purchase fresh produce (Baronberg et al., 2013). This is just one potential strategy in increasing healthful food accessibility and affordability in the city (Baronberg et al., 2013).

Despite the extraordinary potential of Health Bucks, it does have its limitations. In 2024, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) received an astonishing 600 applications for Health Bucks but was unable to fully fund these requests. This sadly left several Food Ed community-based organizations (CBOs) with less requests, which led to reduced amounts of funding or without any funding at all. Increasing the funding for free Health Bucks will allow for Food Ed CBOs to partner with schools in every council district, amplify the application process, and make it easier for low-income families and SNAP participants to access nutritious, affordable foods and positively impact the health of their future generations.

Improving food accessibility is just one part of the food equity puzzle, but another critical piece includes enhancing the diet quality of all city residents to ensure a healthier and more prosperous future for this beautiful city. We can take one step closer to this goal by increasing funding for free Health Bucks. Thank you for your time and consideration in this urgent matter. Your continued support and concern for all communities is greatly appreciated and does not go unnoticed.

Sincerely,



Jasmine Guarin, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University



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Jazmin Garcia
Teachers College, Columbia University
March 14th, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee,

Support for Summer Nutrition Program with Food Education

My name is Jazmin Garcia and I am a graduate student taking a course in community nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to you because I am deeply concerned about supporting summer meals and food education to help low income individuals.

Last year, I worked as an after school tutor for middle school students in New York City. At the end of the tutoring sessions, we would give them a small bag filled with an orange, pretzels and hummus, provided from the school. I saw firsthand how the students were looking forward to eating a snack and how sometimes they would be motivated to pay attention and participate knowing they would receive food at the end of our session. I speculate that some of the students I worked with received most of their meals at school. Some students would often ask if there was extra food they could take home with them. This experience opened my eyes to the prevalence of food insecurity and how some places, such as schools, were havens of resources, such as food.

According to the USDA, nearly 14 million children faced hunger in 2023¹. There are some federal nutrition assistance programs available, such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that are in place to help combat food insecurity. However, when school ends for the summer, many school aged children and youth no longer have access to the free or reduced priced meals that are made available to them at school through the NSLP and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). This may result in increased food insecurity during the summer for low-income families with children. This is why having a summer meal program is imperative to ensure these children continue to have access to nutritious food year round. Additionally, combining summer meal programs with food education offers a number of benefits that go beyond simply providing meals. These food education programs help children and families develop lifelong healthy eating habits by teaching them about nutrition, meal preparation, and the importance of a balanced diet.

It is in the best interest of everyone to promote these programs because it benefits individuals and communities. Primarily, children would receive nutritious food year round while also participating in enrichment educational activities. These programs also benefit families because they help reduce some of the financial burden of food expenses. Additionally, having

¹ Rabbitt, M. P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L. J., & Burke, M. P. (2024). *Household food security in the United States in 2023*(Report No. ERR-337). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://doi.org/10.32747/2024.8583175.ers>

pre-made summer meals could promote healthy and holistic eating habits that could lead to better ways of eating. Moreover, food education programs help individuals gain knowledge around nutritious food and eating patterns so that they can make decisions for themselves. Furthermore, local farmers can benefit from these programs by providing fresh and local produce. Finally, offering these summer meals at places such as schools, churches, parks and community centers helps create a sense of community, gathering and belonging. By investing in summer meal programs with food education, the government not only supports immediate nutritional needs but also contributes to a healthier and more knowledgeable community.

In conclusion, supporting summer meal programs and food education creates positive effects on individual health and community nutrition. These programs can help strengthen communities by reducing food insecurity, improving public health and promoting a culture of lifelong healthy eating.

Sincerely,

Jazmin Garcia, M.A. Candidate in Clinical Psychology
Teachers College, Columbia University

[REDACTED]

Members of the City Council, I am Jeanine Schoen, a parent of a 2nd grader at PS321 in Park Slope Brooklyn, a chair of our school's Family Arts Night, and a brand marketer who uses both right and left brain in my job. I am testifying before you today to protect the arts programs in our public schools.

The American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that a well-rounded education, encompassing diverse experiences and skills, is crucial for children's development and future success, promoting cognitive, social, and emotional growth, and preparing them for college and careers. Additionally, the New York State Education Department Guidance from 2018 also advocates that "when part of a well-rounded education in schools, arts learning contributes to increased academic achievement and student success in preparation for college, career, and life".

My well-rounded education helped me develop skills in critical thinking and problem solving, flex my creative muscle, and develop new ideas - essential in my pursuits at Cornell University & NYU Business school and as a brand marketer providing creative solutions to complex problems at Unilever, Avon, and Coty.

I have been thrilled that my daughter's public school has fostered learning not only in reading, writing, math, science, and the humanities but in arts and music as well. In Art, not only she learned how to create in different mediums (draw, paint, sculpt, etc.) and in music she has learned to develop her vocal instrument. Additionally she has learned

- History - designing creations in the style of Basquiat, Mondrian, Bisa Butler, and learning about the great composers and the styles of music in different generations
- Geometry / Architecture— creating buildings leveraging perspective techniques
- Math – Understanding changes in hue, saturation, and brightness inherent in the color wheel and learning fractions through sheet music
- Poetry – writing songs and ballads
- Teamwork – harmonizing music together

These skills allow her to appreciate the beauty of visual, performing and musical arts across cultures, and are life skills that will help her no matter what her chosen profession. I'd also like to share what art and music mean to some of the 2nd graders at PS321. *(Quotes from PS321 to be added)* I urge you, for the good of all our children to continue to financially support the arts in our public schools.

Members of the City Council, I am Jeanine Schoen, a parent of a 2nd grader at PS321 in Park Slope Brooklyn, a chair of our school's Family Arts Night, and a brand marketer who uses both right and left brain in my job. I am testifying before you today to protect the arts programs in our public schools.

The American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that a well-rounded education, is crucial for children's development and future success, promoting cognitive, social, and emotional growth, and preparing them for college and careers. Additionally, the New York State Education Department Guidance from 2018 advocates that "when part of a well-rounded education in schools, arts learning contributes to increased academic achievement and student success in preparation for college, career, and life".

My well-rounded education helped me develop skills in critical thinking, flex my creative muscle, and develop new ideas - essential in my pursuits at Cornell University & NYU Business school and as a brand marketer providing creative solutions to complex problems at Unilever, Avon, and Coty.

I have been thrilled that my daughter's public school has fostered exceptional programming in the common core as well as the arts and music. Art and music are not only a study of creativity (drawing, painting, sculpting, building, singing, playing) but also...

- History - designing creations in the style of artists like Basquiat, Mondrian, Bisa Butler, and learning about music from composers – Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart
- Math – Leveraging geometry in perspective paintings, using mathematics of the color wheel to impact hue, saturation, and brightness, and learning fractions through sheet music
- Poetry – writing songs and ballads
- Science – the physics of sound wave vibrations and the engineering involved in making musical instruments

- Teamwork – harmonizing music together and working collaboratively on art projects
- Executive Function – Fine motor skills, organizational skills, mindfulness

I've spoken to second graders who note that music & art "calms you down and helps you be your best", are inspired that it can help "you see the results of your work", identify with the success at the end of the struggle "some famous musicians had a rough time" and can help you achieve your dreams like Nina Simone who "started out playing piano in church". Art helps our children appreciate creativity and cultural differences, is an outlet for students who may struggle to express themselves, and provides a different means to learn life skills, necessary in any chosen profession. I urge you, for the good of all our children to continue to financially support the arts in our public schools.

Testimony submitted by:
Jeannie Nahashon, MS-RDN candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dear New York City Council Committee on Education,

My name is Jeannie Nahashon and I am a student in the Master of Nutrition & Public Health program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing in support of your Summer Rising program. When I first learned about Summer Rising I immediately thought about the assistance you are providing to a few groups of kids and families. Firstly, for any families receiving SNAP benefits, having two meals accounted for with snacks during the week is a great way to alleviate some of the food costs that families incur over the week. Secondly, having kids in summer programs assists with social-emotional intelligence, learning, and social skills overall over the summer breaks. If we can keep students up to speed, they are less likely to be held back a year or two in their grade level which means less resources are spent on them in the education system. And lastly, the physical activity that Summer Rising offers can help put a dent in childhood obesity, type II diabetes, hypertension and other avoidable and non-communicable diseases that are on the rise in children.

In 2022, 1.7 million families in the New York City area were on SNAP benefits (Karabatsos et al., 2025). With threats to SNAP benefits being cut, this program has a great opportunity to step up and support the community by providing 10 meals per week which I can only imagine the impact this has on families. As a personal note, as part of our program we had to try to adhere to a SNAP budget for a week where we had roughly \$10/day to spend on food. I personally found this to be incredibly hard. I was constantly hungry because I can't eat as many carbs as other people can because I have to control my glucose. I also ran out of food on day six of the seven day challenge and asked myself what I would do if this was my real life. Having a place to go that not only gave me community and structure, but a free meal would have been such a God send.

Secondly, "students may lose knowledge and skills achieved in the school year during the summer break, with losses greatest for students from low-income families. Educational achievement is an established social determinant of long-term health; thus, an intervention that affects educational achievement can be assumed to also affect long-term health" (Finnie et al., 2019). While this article is advocating for year round school and not so much a summer program, Summer Rising is accomplishing similar things. It's providing school work, structure, activities, food, and creating community. It's providing a safety net by helping to fill in the gaps over the summer, especially for low income kids. As a culture, we prioritize test scores over social-emotional intelligence and connection to one another when both are equally important. You can be book smart but if you are people smart that matters too. Being in community is vital for our health and wellbeing and no other time taught us this more than when it was taken from us

during the pandemic. I understand that funding for programs like Summer Rising need to meet certain standards but I'd like to emphasize that soft skills are just as important. Having a summer program can assist directly and indirectly with getting kids up to speed with schoolwork and social development. The more kids that are up to speed educationally means less kids have to be held back in the school system and that means less resources are spent on them in the long run.

Lastly, 22-27% of children are obese in New York City (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2023). Obesity leads to other adverse health complications later in life. The physical activity offered by Summer Rising gives us a great opportunity to put a dent in those numbers. If we can reduce the amount of children who become sick with avoidable, non-communicable diseases, these children will provide less of a strain to our medical system as they grow up. It seems counter intuitive to think of obese people as food insecure but we typically see obesity and starvation go hand in hand, as they both represent a misutilization of food. Your program is directly addressing both of these issues with increasing access to food and providing movement.

In closing, I really do hope that Summer Rising continues. We have a real opportunity here to create assets to our communities and even future economies. These kids are future doctors, lawyers, teachers, scientists, engineers, artists, managers, business owners and caretakers. They are a reflection of a system that either supports them or fails them. This program will go through highs and lows, as every program does, but I hope you are all tied to the vision of Summer Rising and see the lasting impact a program like this can have.

Thank you so very much for your time and for reading my letter.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Nahashon

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My name is Jenna Kim and I am a student at Francis Lewis highschool. The funding for our NYC education program has been cut off tremendously by \$400 million dollars, which is not enough to support all our students. Not only does this affect the minorities in New York City, but also the New York City students as a whole, including me and my fellow friends.

The need to restore the funding we lost is essential to maintain the educational programs we have. As a student who goes to a title 1 school, it is more crucial to me that we get the sufficient funding that we need to support our students. While attending Francis Lewis High School, I met several friends who were immigrants and people who are a part of marginalized communities. It makes me realize how important and helpful it is to be a part of these certain programs such as tutoring, as it helps reduce certain burdens such as having to worry about money and keeping up with others. I know many of my friends that go to get free tutoring provided by the school, and without this program they would indefinitely struggle to keep up.

In addition, my experience at Francis Lewis High School is that there could be many more adjustments and improvements made, however we simply do not have the funds to do so. In New York and my school especially, we have very old facilities and resources, such as technology and other systems. Everyday I experience how these old technologies and facilities affect the quality of our learning. I remember one time during class, due to the lack of computers, me and four other friends had to share a computer. To add on, it is a daily occurrence at my chemistry class that our old smart board malfunctions at least one time, which affects the quality of our education. I would also like to add how my class had to move rooms permanently because the air conditioner hadn't been repaired yet. Multiple times the hottest the room reached was 80 degrees. The funding cuts would mean that kids would have to continue to learn in these rooms, and their education quality would be affected severely.

Not only would the funding help with maintaining these infrastructures, but it will also help provide for improvements and access to many more learning tools. Thus due to the cuts on the education program, I can not imagine how much more my school and my education specifically could be affected. In my school we have many special programs aside from our core classes. They require a lot of funding in order to maintain them. The budget cut would mean that many programs would be forced to shut down, and due to the insufficient funding many opportunities for our students would be lost. I know that robotics is a big program at my school, and the budget cut would mean that they wouldn't receive the quality of resources that they deserve.

The students of New York City are our future, and we need the proper funding to ensure we get a good education. Please restore the \$400 million that was cut from our education budget so students like me can have the resources we need to succeed.

Jerran Boyer
Nutrition Education MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, NY

March 12th, 2025

Subject: Funding Health Bucks and the Food Ed Hub at Teachers College, Columbia University

Dear Counsel Chair Joseph,

I am writing as a graduate student of the Nutrition Education MS-RDN program at Teachers College, Columbia University, and as an advocate for equitable access to healthy food in our city. As you are aware, food insecurity continues to affect thousands of New Yorkers, disproportionately impacting low-income communities.

The Health Bucks program has been instrumental in increasing access to fresh, healthy and affordable food for individuals and families who rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. However, increased funding is necessary to expand the reach and positive impacts of the Health Bucks program, due to demand outpacing current funding for this vital program.

Health Bucks provides an additional \$2 for every \$2 spent using SNAP benefits at over 130 participating farmers' markets, farm stands and certain Food Box and farm share sites in NYC, allowing recipients to purchase more fruits and vegetables while simultaneously supporting local farmers.¹

Health Bucks program not only incentivizes SNAP recipients to purchase nutritious fruits and vegetables, it also directly helps combat diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension, which are prevalent in underserved communities with limited access to fresh produce.² Studies have shown that financial incentives like Health Bucks significantly increase fruit and vegetable consumption, improving long-term health outcomes and reducing healthcare costs.^{3, 4}

Additional benefits of Health Bucks include providing a larger daily budget for SNAP benefits, stretching recipients' food dollar further. Health Bucks also encourages SNAP recipients to eat more nutritious fresh foods, provides an option for fresh fruits and vegetables that may not otherwise be readily available to all SNAP recipients, and supports local farmers so indelible in our community.

In addition to requesting increasing Health Bucks funding, I am also requesting the renewal of funding for the Food Ed Hub and Coalition at Teachers College, Columbia University. The Food Ed Hub and Coalition provides ongoing support in our communities by amplifying existing food and nutrition-related needs and programs, such as Health Bucks. The Food Ed Hub and Food Ed Coalition also support school-based food and nutrition education through research, advocacy, and support of vulnerable populations in NYC.

As a nutrition education student and long-time New York City resident, I have volunteered in the communities in which I have lived and have witnessed the impacts of food insecurity first-hand. In my volunteerism over the years, I have also had the good fortune of seeing how grateful people are to receive fresh, healthy food and the indelible positive impact food access can have.

I urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the Health Bucks program and the Food Ed Hub in the upcoming budget. Strengthening initiatives and organizations that support the health and well-being of our fellow New Yorkers aligns with the city's commitment to fostering food equity and supporting public health, particularly for those who need it most.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to addressing food insecurity and working to ensure food equity and access to all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Jerran Boyer
Graduate Student, Nutrition Education MS-RDN Program
Teachers College, Columbia University

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Jeylin Frias
City Council Hearing
Committee on Education



Good afternoon, my name is Jeylin Frias. My pronouns are she/her, and I am a youth Leader with Future Of Tomorrow and the Urban Youth Collaborative. Today I am here to ask you that you start investing in our schools and communities and stop prioritizing racist policing practices.

School cops are not helping us stay safe. In my experience I feel very anxious when I have to go to school every morning. Getting to school and stepping into the building the first thing we see is metal detectors, police and scanning wands. One day I was wearing boots that according to them had metal in the sole, so I got pulled to the side in front of all my peers like I was doing something wrong. For me it was a degrading experience. I felt humiliated and terrified while being searched, and as I saw this cop go over to me and tell me to stand in front of a wall. The entire day, all I could think of was the feeling of being targeted as some criminal who did something terrible. We do not need police in our schools. All we need is guidance and real support. My peers and I need to feel safe in what is supposed to be a sanctuary, and you finally need to understand that real safety to us means resources. We need mental health support, more access to extracurriculars, restorative justice and more guidance counselors so we don't have to wait for weeks before talking to someone about our needs. We need fully funded programs like community schools and Student Success Centers that provide us with some of the extra help the system is failing to provide. We are being set up to fail. Today I am here to ask you to prioritize our education, to look at us as the brilliant and unique students each one of us are and invest in our future. I demand you and the Mayor to prioritize our care not criminalization by first; securing a hiring freeze on school cops that does not allow to fill for attrition; cut funding for the remaining vacant school cop positions, and use the funding from both these divestments to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive. You must Cease all NYPD recruitment, hiring, and training of school cops. Do not hire any new school police and permanently eliminate any school police academy classes. This should be a first step toward the full elimination of all school police positions. By not hiring new school cops and cutting the current 675 vacant school cop positions, we could immediately have 100 million dollars to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health and other programs that we need to have real safety and support. It is time for the Mayor and the city to start prioritizing our education, to invest in the promising future of this city, to invest in us, the youth, the students that will hopefully someday be leading this city and our communities.

Hello, my name is Jioh Kim and I am a member of YCPT's community. I appreciate Chair Rita Joseph and Chair Eric Dinowitz for hosting this hearing and allowing us the opportunity to testify. Regarding the Mayor's proposed cuts, I strongly oppose this decision to defund the education department. Instead, I propose that the education department will be properly funded to ensure that several essential programs that many students rely on continue to operate. At YCPT, our mission is to help spread awareness and combat domestic and sexual violence. These cuts would severely impact the mission of YCPT, as the loss of funding for the foundation aid formula would add even more pressure on students that were displaced from their homes due to domestic violence. The cuts could also affect the Mental Health Continuum program, as students affected by domestic violence could be prevented from getting the support they need. The cuts could impact school counselors and support staff who often refer students experiencing domestic violence to programs like YCPT. This would cause many students to lose their education due to the lack of funding. We must not allow this to happen, as we must ensure that the students that depend on this program stay supported and receive proper education. This education could be the difference between a student's failure or success. I hope that these budget cuts are reconsidered, as the education of many students rely on the essential programs that are losing their funding. Students are the future of humanity, their education will affect how the future will go. I urge the council and the Mayor to please consider restoring full funding for public schools and ensuring the proper education of mankind's future.

My name is Jordan Feigenbaum. I am a public school parent in Brooklyn and a member of CEC13, though today I write on my own behalf.

NYC public schools are not equipped to ensure adequate cooling in classrooms or common spaces. The de Blasio administration recognized this and, along with the City Council, enacted a multi-year plan to assess and equip all classrooms citywide with air conditioning units. This ended in 2022, and since that time the Adams administration has not renewed this or anything similar. Today, when an air conditioner breaks down in a classroom, that room simply no longer is cooled, because schools are not provided funding in their annual budgets to replace broken units.

Since the end of the citywide school air conditioner program, my son's own school has seen over half of their classroom window air conditioning units break. The Parent-Teacher Organization at the school reallocated \$20,000 last year in order to replace these broken units, which comprised over half of the units in the school. Our school was fortunate to have the money, though it came at the cost of other expected expenditures. And what of the multitudes of schools who are in no position to raise such funds? Are those students to go without?

The lack of available funding for air conditioning exacerbates these existing inequities. Schools serving more affluent communities have parent associations that can fundraise to address immediate needs, while other schools continue to suffer in the heat. The City Council should not allow this fundamentally unfair system to continue. All New York City students deserve to learn in a healthy environment.

To be clear, this is not a matter of comfort, but rather a public health crisis that the City Council can fix. Thousands of students are learning in overheated spaces that are unhealthy.

I am asking the Council to do four things: (1) work with the School Construction Authority and the Division of School Facilities to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study and survey of air conditioning needs in all New York City public schools; (2) include a line of funding of at least \$25 million in next year's city budget to support this feasibility study and survey of needs, and to address the most urgent air conditioning needs, including making funds available to individual schools as needed to repair and replace window units (the de Blasio initiative ultimately cost over \$400 million, so we expect \$25 million would just be a start) (3) work to expand the list of approved air conditioning vendors so that equipment can be obtained at competitive prices; and (4) work with the City administration to develop a long-term plan to provide our public school buildings with all necessary upgrades and maintenance to keep schools adequately cooled in upcoming years

As the city, and the planet, grapple with the ongoing and worsening effects of climate change, we cannot afford to allow the city's classrooms to continue to operate without effective cooling units.

Thank you.

My name is Julie Whitaker, and I'm the parent of two students at PS9 in Brooklyn. I'm calling on the New York City Council to ensure next year's budget includes funding for air conditioning in our public schools.

My children attend a large elementary school, and last spring, half of the classrooms had air conditioners that were either broken or insufficient. As a member of the PTO, I learned the school had no budget to replace the units, and neither did the DOE. To solve the problem, the PTO raised \$20,000 to replace the units, but by the time we did, a heat wave had already hit the city. The DOE provided portable units, but they weren't made to operate at a level that could cool a classroom. Our gym and common areas had no air conditioning at all.

This issue shouldn't be handled by individual schools—it's impractical and unfair. Under Mayor de Blasio, there was a plan to equip all classrooms with air conditioning, but after the initiative ended in 2022, no central plan has replaced broken units or upgraded common spaces.

This is a matter of safety, health, and equity. All schools deserve air conditioning, regardless of their community's resources.

I'm asking the council to take four actions:

1. work with the School Construction Authority and the Division of School Facilities to conduct a feasibility study and survey of air conditioning needs in all public schools;
2. allocate at least \$25 million in next year's budget to fund the feasibility study and survey, and address urgent needs, including repairing or replacing broken window units;
3. expand the list of approved air conditioning vendors to ensure competitive pricing; and
4. work with the City to develop a long-term plan to keep all schools adequately cooled.

Thank you for your time and support.

Kaitlyn Weinstein
Student, Nutrition Education Program
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W 120th St, New York, NY 10027

March 10, 2025

Dear Members of the NYC Department of Education and Policy Makers,

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in reading this letter. My name is Katie Weinstein, and I am currently a graduate student studying Nutrition Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to advocate for a funding increase for food education programming in New York City Public Schools [NYCPS]. I believe that additional funding would contribute to a healthier generation of future NYC residents due to an improved ability to make healthy choices as well as learn in the classroom.

There is no better way to shape the minds of future generations than through nutrition education. Healthy students perform better academically, express more positive behaviors in the classroom, and develop stronger cognitive skills - all skills necessary for success (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023). However, education grants are only given to 190 of the approximately 1,800 NYCPS, and acquiring the knowledge necessary to make informed health choices is much a more difficult task without the necessary resources. With an additional \$3 million in funding, resources to make healthier choices could benefit students from an additional 100 schools through increased food education. Additionally, the funding would provide professional development opportunities for staff to teach these transformative lessons.

Food education is an extremely important component in teaching the youth how to make healthy choices. In low-income and underserved communities, nutrition knowledge and formal education are often limited, which contributes to long-term health disparities, negative behavior outcomes, and a further generational divide (Rosales et al., 2022). As a result, there is often a poor relationship with food in these communities, leading to a cycle of unhealthy eating patterns. Students who receive nutrition education feel empowered to make healthier choices to promote physical and mental wellness, which may have lasting impacts on their families and communities. With this occurring many times over, it can even extend to impact the culture of minoritized communities.

I first became interested in nutrition during my middle school health class. I remember being fascinated with the idea that nutrition can make us feel good. During my undergraduate years, I took a mandatory Introductory to Nutrition course that piqued my interest in nutrition as preventative medicine. I know first-hand how empowering and influential nutrition education can be; I literally would not be writing this if my nutrition education were not so influential. Food education, in conjunction with proper resources, can help people change the course of their lives by helping them combat chronic diet-related diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity - issues that disproportionately affect lower-income populations of NYC.

I am a strong believer that it is the responsibility of schools to prepare the youth for a life of success and that the NYC Department of Education and local government entities must support schools through funding and resources. There is no better way to do just that than through nutrition education and teaching children how to support their health. This results in children who are more engaged, focused, and ultimately academically successful, which sets students up for a life of prosperity. The additional funding for professional development for educators also ensures that teachers are well-equipped to deliver high-quality, evidence-based nutrition education to their students. This is extremely important considering that nutrition research is an up-and-coming field where new studies are published every day. Appropriate funding and compensation would motivate top-tier nutrition educators to get involved.

I implore you to allocate the \$3 million in funding to support nutrition education programming in NYCPS. This funding can change the lives of thousands of NYC students by giving them the knowledge and resources to live healthier lives and be set up for success. This funding is an investment in a future generation of NYC residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your support is crucial in changing the course of many students. I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Sincerely,
Kaitlyn Weinstein
Student, Nutrition Education Program
Teachers College, Columbia University

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Kajal Below

Brooklyn, NY, 11215

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

3K funding should be restored. It prepares kids for schools and helps parents work. This reduces later reading/math intervention costs that also cost taxpayers money and allows parents to contribute to the NY economy and tax base. It's a financial incentive as well as a social one, and should receive support.

I never received services, but I am privileged. 2/3 of this city is not, and this is for them.

March 13, 2025
City Council Budget Hearing: Committee on Education

Honorable Chair Joseph and members of the committee,

I am writing as a community member and working parent who has firsthand experience navigating the complexities of childcare and early education in our city. I urge you to support Pantomima, a local, woman-of-color-led daycare, in their application to establish a free, dual-language, Department of Education (DOE) 3K program.

I deeply value the city's commitment to providing free preschool programs starting at age three. Access to safe and reliable childcare is essential for working parents like myself, enabling us to contribute meaningfully to our community. In my professional capacity I lead a team that serves hundreds of immigrant New Yorkers. My ability to serve our city is directly supported by the dedicated women at Pantomima who care for my children. Many families in Sunset Park share this experience.

Therefore, I strongly advocate for Pantomima's 3K program proposal. To demonstrate community support, I gathered nearly 120 signatures in just a few days from past, present, and future Pantomima families, as well as unaffiliated community members who support their application and hope to see the 3K program open this Fall.

Attached is a sign-on letter, which was delivered to our Chair Aviles, detailing our reasons for supporting Pantomima and requesting your support in funding 3K programs and ensuring that organizations like Pantomima are able to continue to provide vital, free, childcare into our communities.

Sincerely,

Karina Albistegui Adler

March 3rd, 2025

Hon. Council Member Aviles,

We write to you as constituent-parents to strongly advocate for Pantomima's application to open a DOE 3K center in our community. Many of us have had the pleasure and privilege of sending our child/ren to Pantomima starting in infancy. We have watched firsthand our children flourish under the expert care of Pantomima's teachers who skillfully provide a warm, nurturing, quality, Spanish-immersion education while they simultaneously encourage creativity and wonder. We want to ensure more children can benefit from this outstanding Latina-owned, immigrant-owned, South Brooklyn institution.

The expansion of Pantomima as a DOE funded, Spanish dual-language, 3K program will be a tremendous asset to our community. Indeed, such dual-language 3K programs are few and far between outside of a few pilot programs within the DOE. Furthermore, it is even more rare to find the level of expertise and rigor in teaching 3-year-olds in a dual-language setting that the Pantomima team champions.

Importantly, our local community needs continuous care options during the early childhood years. Middle- to low-income families in our community struggle to pay out of pocket for early childcare and education costs and seek out DOE-funded options as soon as they are available. Unfortunately, very few local daycares offer childcare from infancy through 3K, and further, very few of the local 3K programs offer seats beyond PreK. **This leaves families with limited options for continuous care and education in the critical 3 to 4 year age range.** At a time when skilled attention, routine, attachment, and consistency is necessary for young children to thrive and to prepare for Kindergarten, it is common for parents in our community to be forced to move children to different schools yearly between 3K and Kindergarten to participate in DOE-funded programs.

For these reasons and more, we respectfully request that you assist our community in advancing Pantomima's application within the DOE. If necessary and appropriate, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you and any relevant

DOE sta to discuss our request.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Pantomina Families

Abigail Levine

Adam Kwapich

Aily Nash

Alena Kastin

Alexandra Pincay

Alexandro Ramirez

Alicia Navarra

Amanda C

Amanda Hines

Ana l rodriguez

Andrea M

Andrew Berman

Anne Smanik

Annie Zhang

Aracelis H

Ariel Poster

Belle Stone

Boyda Johnstone

Cary Rothschild

Cecilia Lopez

Chelsea Rivera

Cindy McNamara

Colleen Peabody-Diez

Courtney Epton

Crystal Alvarez.

Dan Dzula

Danielle and Matt Aronson-Wang

David Klassen

David Lassen

David Peabody Diez
David Smanik
Deanna Kawitzky
elisabeth perez
Elizabeth Perez
Elly Perkins
Emma Dzula
Erica W
Etienne medina
Fiona F
Gabriela Corona
Garrett Albistegui Adler
Gerald Johnson
Gianell F
Grisel G
Ilona Legaspi
Ivy Anderson
Jacqueline Garcia
Jane Li
Jennifer Carnig
Jennifer Waters
Jessica Ortiz
Jillian Quint
Johanna Bjorken
Jonathan Willner
Jordan Alzos-Benke
Julia Livi
Julia S.
Kari Love
Karina Albistegui Adler
Karla Pippa
Kasandra Rodriguez
Katherine J. Chan
Katia Gonzalez
Katie Mohrhauser

Kieran McNamara
Laura A.
Laura Kastin
Lauren Alzos-Benke
Lauren Naturale
Leidy Hoyos
Leilana Marrero
Lilibeth Caraballo
Lisette Arnaud-Hevi
Lori Franco
Luisa Zapata
Mabel Fu
Madeline Garay
Maria Feliciano
Maria G.
Marisol Castaneda
Matthew Nelson
Maxine Montilus
Meesha Meksin
Meghan Bernhardt
Melissa Garay
Melissa Pratt
Mercy Cordova
Michael Ackil
Mirabela T
Monica Valenzuela
Myasia robinson
Nasrene Haj
Nathan Kensinger
Nicolas Vega
Paul Snyder
Rachel Horowitz
Rita Doyle
Rosa Rivera
Rosalba osorio
RT

Sallie Mize
Sandra Hale
Sandra Saetama
Sarah Manasrah
Sarah W
Shilpa Narayan
Simone Kung
Sonia Nacipucha
Stephen Roberts
Stewart W.
Susan Bernal
Szabina Szafian
Tiany velez
Weiyun Ye
Wendie b
Wendy Moran
Yeslie Maldonado
Zuri Fernandez

Kate Ganim

Brooklyn, NY, 11215

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Universal 3K has allowed us to continue living in the city. The cost of living, and especially childcare, are astronomical - helping to relieve this burden makes living here much more doable.

We've been lucky and got our 3yo into a 3k spot that we love! I don't know what we would've done or how we would've made it with if not. The reductions in 3k funding make us nervous about what will happen with our new baby's childcare as she gets older - will she be afforded the same care, or will we be pushed out of the city?

Kathryn Jagers MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W 120th St, New York, NY 10027

New York City Council
250 Broadway, New York, NY 10007
March 13th, 2025

Dear New York City Council,

My name is Kathryn Jagers and I am pursuing my masters in nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I'm writing in support of funding for the Summer Rising program as proposed in the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Plan. I'm also recommending an increase in funding for Health Bucks during the summer for families with school-age children.

One in four children in New York City experiences food insecurity, meaning they don't have access to enough food for a healthy lifestyle (Map the Meal Gap, 2025). During the school year, these children rely on school meals as their regular source of nutrition. However, when school meals take a break during the summer, food insecurity becomes even more pervasive. The Summer Rising program is essential for providing nutritious meals to children year-round. It's also an opportunity for nutrition education, which can help build life-long healthy habits and prevent chronic disease in the future.

As additional support for healthy eating during the summer, expansion of the Health Bucks program can help families afford more fresh fruits and vegetables from farmers markets. These spaces serve as lively and encouraging environments for people to learn about new fruits and vegetables, however, they tend to be expensive. With Health Bucks, families' money goes further and they can buy healthier food than they'd otherwise be able to access. This is essential during the summer when children may be home more frequently and other benefits, like SNAP, are readily exhausted.

Food insecurity during childhood has shown to be strongly associated with obesity, diabetes, and other negative health outcomes later in life (Carvajal-Aldaz, 2022). Summer Rising and Health Bucks are important preventive programs to fill the gap for an entire quarter of the year. Without them, hundreds of thousands of children in NYC will be even hungrier. They will suffer through summer with grumbling bellies and without energy to play outside like kids should be able to do. Then, when they return to school in the fall, their health and academic performance will be at a disadvantage. This becomes a never-ending cycle of food insecurity that eventually promotes chronic disease.

I appreciate NYC Council's time and consideration in reviewing these recommendations. Thank you for everything you do to support NYC families. Programs like Summer Rising and Health Bucks can truly make a difference today and for the rest of children's lives.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Jagers, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

[REDACTED]

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Carvajal-Aldaz, D., Cucalon, G., & Ordonez, C. (2022). Food insecurity as a risk factor for obesity: A review. *Frontiers in nutrition*, 9, 1012734.
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Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Katie Mohrhauser and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is seeking approval for their program to include a DOE funded 3K to continue to provide high quality bilingual education to the children in our community. I am concerned that the roll back of the 3K expansion will prevent this program and other programs like it from continuing to serve our community.

My child has THRIVED at Pantomima. The teachers at Pantomima fill my child's day with love, creativity, and joy every day. Every child deserves the opportunity to go to a place like Pantomima, irrespective of socioeconomic status.

In this budget season, we ask you to continue to invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services and facilitating licenses to beloved neighborhood institutions like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.
Sincerely,

Katie Mohrhauser
Parent and Advocate

Testimony of Kevin Ly

Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Chair Rita Joseph

March 13, 2025 – 10:00 AM

Good morning, Chair Joseph and members of the Committee. My name is Kevin Ly, and I am a lifelong New Yorker, a graduate of NYC public schools, and a proud resident of Forest Hills, Queens. I am also a father of two young children—ages 5 and 3—who, like so many children across this city, rely on early childhood education, summer programming, and afterschool care to thrive.

Today, I am urging the Council to prioritize **improving the enrollment process and programming for Summer Rising, expanding funding for faith-based Pre-K programs, and making afterschool programs universal.**

Summer Rising: Fixing Enrollment Gaps & Enhancing Programming

I want to recognize the **NYC Department of Education and the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD)** for their commitment to **Summer Rising**. This program is an essential resource for families across the city. However, **last year, only 60% of families who were accepted actually attended.** That means thousands of parents who truly needed a seat were left without options while spaces went unused. **That is unfair.**

We need a **more efficient enrollment process** to ensure that **seats are given to families who will use them.** Additionally, Summer Rising should **become more recreational and enrichment-based, particularly in July and August.** Many parents feel the program lacks engaging activities, leading to lower attendance. Expanding **structured sports like soccer and basketball, arts programs, and hands-on STEM learning** would make the program more attractive and effective, ensuring children stay engaged and excited to participate.

Faith-Based Pre-K: A Critical Choice for Families

I firmly believe that **faith-based institutions and schools are uniquely positioned to provide high-quality early childhood education from birth through Pre-K.** These schools have a strong track record of fostering both academic and social-emotional development in a structured, nurturing environment.

Faith-based schools also **offer the extended hours that working parents need.** At my child's **Catholic academy, I can drop off at 7:15 AM and pick them up at 5:30 PM**—a level of flexibility that most public schools do not provide. Without sufficient funding, many families lose access to this vital option, leaving them with few alternatives that meet their childcare and work needs. Expanding support for **faith-based early education** will give parents real choices and ensure children receive the strong foundation they deserve.

Universal Afterschool: Supporting Families Beyond the School Day

Afterschool programs should be a **right, not a privilege.** Every child should have access to a **safe, structured, and enriching environment after school.** Yet, many families—mine included—face challenges with **limited slots, long waitlists, or unaffordable costs.** For working parents, this gap in coverage creates serious hardships. Expanding **universal afterschool programming** would give all children, regardless of income or neighborhood, access to the academic support, recreational activities, and social engagement that help them thrive.

A Call for Action

Families like mine depend on these programs. As a father, a New Yorker, and a public school graduate, I ask the Council to **enhance Summer Rising, invest in faith-based early childhood education, and expand universal afterschool care**. These are not luxuries—they are essential programs that support working parents, provide stability for children, and strengthen communities across New York City.

Thank you for your time and leadership. I appreciate your commitment to our city's students and families.

Sincerely,

Kevin Ly

Forest Hills, NY 11375



March 11, 2025

Re: PANTOMIMA: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Kieran McNamara, and I am a proud father to my three-year old son, Finnian. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to preschools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Preschools like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families struggle to afford private preschools, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is seeking approval for their program to include a DOE funded 3K to continue to provide high quality bilingual education to the children in our community. I am concerned that the roll back of the 3K expansion will prevent this program and other programs like it from continuing to serve our community.

Pantomima is a special, well-known institution in Sunset Park, South Brooklyn. We actually commute each day from Dyker Heights to Sunset Park so our son Finnian can spend the day at Pantomima with his amigos - learning ABCs, 123s, words, feelings, socializing, having fun outdoors, making arts and crafts, and playing theater. Finnian, who started at Pantomima at 20 months old and is now 3 years old, is bilingual in Spanish and English, despite no native Spanish speakers at home - a superb example of the high quality of early childhood education Pantomima provides. Every single educator and caregiver I know at Pantomima is warm, caring, nurturing and loving. It's our son's home away from home and is our family. This is truly an environment where we want our children to thrive in their formative early years to set a solid foundation and pathway to success to grow into future leaders in the world.

In this budget season, we ask you to continue to invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services and facilitating licenses to beloved neighborhood institutions like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Kieran McNamara
Parent and Advocate



Good afternoon everyone, my name is Kimberly Gil and my pronouns are she/her. I'm in 11th grade and a student at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. I am also a Restorative Justice youth leader at my school! I'm here because I want to let the city know how important restorative justice is in schools and that students want the city to fully fund Restorative Justice, and divest from school police.

Discipline and policing creates barriers to learning and violates the safety and wellbeing of students – particularly Black, Brown, immigrant and trans young people, who are targeted most by school police. I have seen this firsthand when people of my campus community have been judged and assumed to have malicious intent because of racial stereotypes. I have seen administrators segregate and ridicule students because of the language they speak and in turn I have seen those students come to school less and less. I have seen school safety challenge and harass students of color who don't speak english more than students who do speak english. If schools used RJ with administrators and school safety we could interrupt the school to prison pipeline.

Restorative justice programs teach accountability and empathy. I have seen RJ give students confidence in coming to school, in having trust in our community to face unfamiliar situations, eventually building trust in themselves to face the day. The RJ program at my school has allowed me to create community with peers and teachers, form self-regulation and mediation skills, and be a part of a new family that I know cares for my education. I feel safer at my school because I am a RJ youth leader. Please fund and expand funding for restorative justice in all schools. Please show us that you care about us, the youth of New York, by creating accountable, safe, and caring schools through restorative justice. Thank you.

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WESTCHESTER
46 WALLER AVENUE
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL: 914 948 8466
FAX: 914 948 0311

Kyae Sin Linn Lat, student at John Dewey High School

My name is Kyae, a student at John Dewey High School. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Language Access campaign.

The Asian American Student Advocacy Project is the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families' (CACF) citywide youth leadership program

I am here today to address needs for ELL students including AAPI ELL students, who **are trapped in the closed world of isolation, discouragement, and low-confidence**, often struggling with language barriers academically **and socially**. As someone who came to the country two years ago, not only do I feel like my English is my weakness, but **judgements from peers and teachers** also made me feel like I am not learning fast enough. I am also simply **stressed out** about having conversations because I stutter when finding words in my head. I was lucky enough to make friends with our ELL students in my classes; however, due to how we are separated from the native English speakers classmates, I would still get nervous to hold conversations with them

To me, it often feels like **schools do not create a proper environment where ELL students can receive support when learning English**. Moreover, the English we learned is academic language, so it makes it hard to hold everyday conversations. I feel like, as ELL, we are often being dumped by the school and **fighting alone for ourselves with academic and social pressures**.

Beyond translation support, our language access team firmly believes that the City and **DOE must do more to create a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable school environment for English Language Learners**.

We found that many ELL students struggle with social integration because they lack spaces to practice English. We need schools to actively practice integration of students and make sure the goal of ELL students is **not just to pass the NYSSLAT test, but the goal is to gain confidence in speaking English, make friends, find themselves in the community, and have the resources they need to thrive.**

We want the schools to be able to properly communicate with our families. My parents deserve to have information delivered properly to them. I shouldn't be expected to translate, however, that is often the case because our language is not a top-spoken language in New York City, which makes me feel more isolated.

We call on the City to create an equitable and inclusive environment to help ELL students to feel heard about their struggles by implementing special programs that can fill in their language needs and provide engaging materials for an inclusive learning experience. Thank you.

Waiza Irshad, student at Staten Island Technical High School

My name is Waiza Irshad, and I am a junior at Staten Island Technical High School. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Anti-Bullying and Harassment campaign.

For many AAPI students, we face unique challenges that often make us feel disconnected or overlooked. It's not always the blatant bullying **but** the small, repeated moments that go unnoticed: the jokes about how we look, the comments about our food, or the assumptions made about our cultures.

In my school, there was an incident that made clear how racism can negatively impact students, especially when it comes to our identities. A group of students decided to create a list ranking East Asian girls in our grade, reducing them to nothing more than objects for comparison. The list was demeaning and hurtful, not just for students on the list but the school community. I was disappointed by the way the incident was handled. The students who were involved were not held accountable. Those who caused harm were not given a real explanation of why what they did was wrong. It felt like the system just wanted to move on, but the harm had already been done. **This left many students feeling invisible and worthless, including myself. We all deserve an inclusive school environment that centers on empathy and humanity, and it hurts to say that is not the case for us.**

As AAPI youth, we're often reduced to assumptions about our culture, our intelligence, or our behavior. As a result of the "model minority" myth, teachers have biases — believing AAPI students are academically gifted, hardworking, and quiet, this completely ignores our individuality. We're constantly being asked whether we are terrorists or viruses by peers,

comments that are **hurtful and disheartening**. All of these ignorances and misunderstandings come from lack of understanding of each other.

The Anti-Bullying and Harassment Campaign Team believes the solution to addressing bullying and harassment in schools is not punishment **but creating an environment of empathy that focuses on healing and repairing harm**. We believe every school should have a restorative justice coordinator to help guide students toward better conflict resolution and understanding. Through restorative justice, schools can be proactive, creating a space where students feel safe and included, and the entire school community learns to move forward together, stronger and more connected.

We need the City to take meaningful steps to prioritize the wellness of students. That's why we believe every school should have a restorative justice coordinator, **and the City must have baseline funding for the program**. We know that meaningful change takes time, so the funding for such initiatives must be **sustainable and protected from cuts**. We want to create a community where all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or background, feel valued, safe, and understood. Thank you.

Brandon Lee, student at NYC Lab School

My name is Brandon, a student at Lab High School in Manhattan. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Language Access campaign.

In school, I always felt a sense of distance from my friends because of my background. For example, kids in school would always compare skin colors and as an Asian, I felt secluded, as I was the only one of color. My experiences as an AAPI student is something other students can relate to. **The constant feeling of being “different”** led me to join the Language Access campaign in ASAP. While I may not be an immigrant myself, I believe we have shared struggles, and it can be worse for them due to the additional language barriers.

English Language Learners not only need to learn the language, they also have to adapt to a whole new culture, social life and also have to support their families who are often in need of language support as well. AAPI ELLs face additional challenges in school, such as social isolation due to stereotypes, different accents, and sometimes even the cultural food they are eating. Moreover, oftentimes, school resources are not translated into their language, and it puts the burden onto AAPI ELL students to translate for their families. **Supporting ELLs students must go beyond the academic support. It is a shame that ELLs are not getting the adequate support they deserve.**

Language access isn't just providing translation. This is why in ASAP, we advocate for the creation of more culturally responsive and integrated spaces for AAPI ELL students in high schools across the city. Implementing these spaces requires understanding their social and academic barriers. We need schools to actively foster an environment where all students, including ELL students, feel genuinely welcomed and supported to be themselves and thrive.

No one should be judged based on their speed at learning English. We believe their identity as English Language Learners **should not be ashamed**, and their ability to be multilingual must be cherished. All families should be receiving information and school materials regardless of the language they speak. Navigating a new education system is challenging for both parents and ELL students, and it is on the school to ease that burden. The **City must baseline the funding support for immigrant students and families**. This also means having different ways of outreach, such as using ethnic media and translating material into more languages. **We also need data disaggregation to have a full understanding of the language needs of students.**

We believe that the City can and must do more to support and protect our immigrant students and families, through many different ways. They are part of the community, so the City must take action to make that happen. **No one should feel excluded, isolated, or judged in our school system; we all deserve to be seen and valued. Thank you.**

Ayesha Tasnim, student at Bard High School Early College in Manhattan

My name is Ayesha, and I am a junior at Bard High School Early College in Manhattan. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Mental Health campaign.

From the first day of **freshman year**, I knew I'd never fit in. The teachers never understood why I didn't comprehend the math concepts sometimes. My classmates asked me for help even when I didn't understand it. **I wondered why it was me that my classmates came to.** As a Pakistani student, **it is hard for me to see myself in the school community. I questioned my belonging and existence. All of these negatively impact my mental health on a daily basis.**

I know I am not the only one who has faced these stereotypes yet has had no one to talk to about it. Over time, these stereotypes and expectations have **reduced our individuality** to a simple grade. **But we are more than just a number, we have feelings, emotions, and thoughts that deserve to be addressed and supported.**

I want my school and all schools to **prioritize students' mental health because mental health isn't just about diagnoses; it is part of our wellness.** Schools seem to have implicit biases when AAPI students are doing seemingly well, or if students don't reach out themselves, then they don't need help. However, as a student, **how** can I reach out if I feel like no one understands my concerns? **How** can I recognize my feelings and emotions when we never talk about it in school?

ASAP's mental health campaign aims to identify mental health needs and challenges faced by AAPI youth in NYC public high schools and to advocate for cultural humility and culturally responsive mental health services in schools.

This year, we aim to identify how the Model Minority Myth and a lack of data impact AAPI students' well-being. **We want to see systemic changes in schools.** Addressing and de-stigmatizing mental health have to be approached from **different angles and holistically** that address some of the root causes of the issue. For example, a curriculum change that would include the teaching and learning of mental health as mental well-being in classes like health class. This is not a mental health club where only a portion of the students would learn to understand mental health. We would like the City to reduce class size **and** implement it. Small class size would allow students to build connections more effectively and make it easier for teachers to understand and see students' individuality. We need **continuous** funding to hire more diverse social workers and ensure there are enough social workers per school to support all students. Thank you.



**NYC Council Committee on Education
FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Thursday, March 13, 2025**

Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Thank you, Chair Joseph and the Committee on Education, for the opportunity to testify on the FY 26 budget for NYC Public Schools. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, is a non-profit organization with an over 40-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age. While our primary focus and direct services are around access to high quality, culturally responsive and sustaining early learning and school-aged education, we understand that many intersectional circumstances and experiences within the community impact the well-being of children and their family support structures. As such, we deliver holistically responsive services within the schools, early care and learning programs, and wider communities we serve across NYC, through and beyond our state and city contracted programs and services.

Overview of Our Services

CHCF's Early Care and Education team supports child care and early learning programs, and family access to child care (birth through school-age) in our work as a Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agency¹ and as a Family Child Care Network under the Department of Education. CHCF additionally engages providers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), supporting the nutrition of children in the communities through their child care program. Our Youth Development team delivers after-school programming in partnership with three schools in the Bronx; and career and college readiness programming to high school juniors and seniors at four schools in Manhattan and the Bronx. Above and beyond the academic supports we offer in our school-based programs, we support mental health and social emotional development, student interest and career exploration, and connection to additional resources and opportunities beyond the school walls. Our Social Services team oversees direct supports and services at one of the hotel-based shelters for asylum seekers in Long Island City, ensuring culturally and linguistically responsive and trauma informed support to newly arrived families navigating complex city systems. Finally, our Community Empowerment Department enhances our general delivery of comprehensive supports in direct program spaces, expanding the reach of our agency services and supports beyond these physical spaces into the surrounding communities, addressing several issues, reflective of the needs of the families and communities (i.e. housing, immigration, food access, healthcare access, etc.).

¹ NYC Child Care Resource & Referral Consortium. <https://nycrr.org/>





School-Based Programming & Educational Equity

During a school year, CHCF has historically provided after school programming at three different schools in the Bronx, with a capacity to reach over 500 students, and by extension delivers resources and services to their families. During the 2023-2024 school year, CHCF served 183 students at PS 59 (about 49% of the K-5 school population); 275 students at PS/MS 279 (roughly 40% of the school population); and 60 students at PS 226 (19% of the K-5 population). During the summer of 2024, we continued to extend our services at PS/MS 279 to deliver Summer Rising programming 245 students (160 elementary students and 85 middle school students).

CHCF demonstrates the value-add of connecting community-based partners with schools to comprehensively meet the unique needs of students and their families. CBO partners, like CHCF, strategically coordinate funding and resources outside of school budgets to serve the holistic needs of the school and the surrounding community. We continue to attest to the critical importance of sustaining programs that strengthen and grow such partnerships between schools and CBOs that demonstrate positive impact on students, families, and communities.

CHCF advocates at both the state and city level for investments towards universal child care, including out-of-school-time care for school-aged children. To move NYC towards that goal, it will take concerted, strategic investments by both the state and city, with particular attention to sustaining existing programs and capacity from which to grow.

Out-of-school-time programming advocates were successful in working with the state on stabilizing and strengthening their funded programs, by eliminating the long-standing inequities between the Advantage After School program and the Empire State After School program which were creating unnecessary difficulties for contracted organizations who were running the programs. In 2024, the two programs were merged into LEAPS, with a higher funding rate that moved towards the true cost of care. Unfortunately, the state failed to increase funding to allow for the per-seat rate increase while maintaining and growing programs throughout the state. While some new programs were able to open across the state in regions of need; over 200 programs state-wide with established programs and strong school and community partnerships lost capacity. Such programs, like CHCF, were approved to continue delivery of services, but funded to deliver the programs. The result has been a loss of after school programming/capacity in schools across NYC; and specifically, in CHCF, that translated to a 50% reduction in the seats.

While we continue to work with the state to remedy the harm done to our schools, students, and families with a drop-off in availability of program seats in their schools, we bring the issue up here to underscore the need for NYC Council champions to avoid adding to the loss through city funded out-of-school-time programming; and to avoid any educational program funding decreases that could threaten established CBO partnerships in schools. A few funding priorities we are paying attention to, which support our programs, communities and schools are:

⇒ **Essential Education Programs currently funded by one-year city funding**



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We appreciate that City leaders made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget last year to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars. While the City baselined many of these programs, they funded other programs for one year only, meaning the funding will expire for critical and impactful programming at the end of June unless City leaders act to extend funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include (but are not limited to):

- Summer Rising (\$80M);
- 3-K programs for thousands of young children (\$112M);
- Preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities (\$55M);
- Extended day seats for 3-K and Pre-K to help meet the needs of working parents (\$25M);
- Outreach efforts to help ensure families are aware of the early childhood programs available to them (\$5M);
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as well as the new class size requirements (\$10M);
- Immigrant family communication and outreach to help ensure families can receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access (\$4M);
- More than 50 community schools – providing after-school programs, mental healthcare, food pantries, and more to school communities (\$14M);
- Arts programming so that students can get exposure to the arts in their schools (\$41M);
- The Mental Health Continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn (\$5M);
- Restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (\$12M);
- High-impact tutoring to help students get the support they need in reading and math (\$4M); and
- Student Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high schools prepare for college (\$3.3M).

We join with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the city to baseline funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years. We also join with the coalition in calling on the city to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs.

⇒ **Foundation Aid Formula Changes**

As a member of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, CHCF echoes our deep concern that Governor Hochul's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid per pupil funding formula would result in New York City schools getting \$350 million less than they would under the current formula. We urge you to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula drive more resources to NYC schools and specific student groups who continue to be under-resourced, such as multilingual students, students





living in temporary housing, and students with disabilities; and certainly do not result in our schools receiving less money than they would under the current formula.

Early Care and Learning Programming

CHCF holds a Family Child Care Network under NYCPS Division of Early Care and Education that has grown to support 40 affiliated providers/programs – most of whom speak Spanish as their primary language – to deliver high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive programming to 193 children. ECE programming supports the healthy development of NYC’s children, particularly those who are from communities that have been historically under-resourced; and offers stability to parents who are trying to navigate work and family needs. The value of ECE programs is not only widely documented and evidence-based, but are widely touted by city leaders, including the Mayor.² Unfortunately, the stability of funding for city ECE programs and expansion to universal 3K remain uncertain, leaving community-based providers uncertain about the future of contracts and funded capacity, and families uncertain about their ability to find affordable care options, despite an ongoing need and demonstrably positive impact of these programs on our communities and NYC’s families.

We wish to remind this committee that the Family Child Care Network contracts are coming to an end in 2026 and will need to be replaced with a new RFP. We want to ensure that funding cuts that could impact current community partnerships and capacity for families should not be allowed to go through under any false narrative of a reduced need or demand. Demand remains high and, in fact, we need to do more to adjust school-day/year seats to extended day/year seats to better reflect the care needs that are not being met across the city. We call on the city to maintain funding at current levels, baseline any one-year funding that was put in place to replace federal funds that ended last year, and allow for increases to transition more 3K school day/year seats to extended day/year seats reflective of networks that have a waitlist for extended day/year and under-enrollment in school day/year.

Of additional concern are long-standing inequities across the NYC child care system as a result of inadequate funding and contracting inequities, which are disproportionately harming low-income communities of color and immigrant communities, and the child care workforce, which is predominantly made up of women, people of color, and immigrant women.

- ⇒ There continue to be central system malfunctions that are perpetuating confusion of care options for families that increase likelihood that they will not be connected to the least restrictive care option that best meets their need (including hours/days of care reflective of need and program type that would best support family and child need);
- ⇒ These centralized enrollment system issues translate to delayed enrollment or under-enrollment in FCC programs, which jeopardizes the stability of these programs in the long-term.

² Mayor Adams, City Council Announce Historic 10-Point Plan to Make High-Quality Child Care More Affordable, Accessible for all New Yorkers (29 Aug 2024). Retrieved from: <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/668-24/mayor-adams-city-council-historic-10-point-plan-make-high-quality-child-care-more#/0>





This is especially alarming at a time when we are well aware of the existing and growing child care deserts across the city and state.³

- ⇒ There is continued inadequate outreach to families, particularly those in high-needs communities and demographics, to ensure they are aware of and have seamless access to free or low cost extended day/year care and early learning for which they are eligible – which continues to perpetuate a grossly inaccurate narrative that there is not a demand for what is available; and
- ⇒ There continues to be inequities across NYCPS child care contracts (FCCN compared to Birth-to-Five) which maintain instability among our most vulnerable early care and education programs, serving our most vulnerable communities.

Family Child Care programs continue to be essential to overwhelmingly low-income communities and communities of color, particularly in communities with large immigrant populations. FCC programs are overwhelmingly staffed by women of color and immigrant women and continue to be disproportionately underfunded and under-resourced and, as a result, are facing disproportionate risk of closure. These lacking supports and resources to this portion of the field translate to resource inequities for the families and children served in these programs and are the start to the long-term education inequities that students in these communities face throughout the education system.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy, at: ddemeuse@chcfinc.org or [REDACTED]

³ U.S. Child Care Deserts. The Center for American Progress. Retrieved from: <https://childcaredeserts.org/>





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Testimony of Lauren Manca, 10th grade student:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Lauren Manca and I am a 15 year old sophomore at The Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This semester, I have been participating in a Community-Based Civics project through Generation Citizen.

For this project, my class discussed issues that impact us within our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After much debate, we decided to focus on access to mental health services and set a goal to keep them available in schools.

COVID-19 had a major effect on the school systems, which put extra stress on students. At-home workloads were increased and kids were expected to keep up with these new changes. Challenges like these can take a toll on students' mental health. Having a mental health counselor or a program that students can rely on gives them a space to talk about difficult matters.

Going back to school after COVID-19 was a stressful experience for myself and many other students. After being so used to fully digital school, it was hard to return to an in-person classroom. When my school implemented a mental health program where we received weekly lessons, I felt like I could handle more of my schoolwork. Having a counselor who understood our challenges made me feel better since I knew that I was not the only person struggling.

Evidently, Covid had a large effect on the mental health of many students, and we are still dealing with it today. Having mental health facilities available in schools allows kids to feel like they have a place to go to that is free of judgement, since many of them may not have a family member that they can speak to about their struggles.

All of this is why I am asking the NYC City Council to not cut the funding for mental health programs in schools. It is extremely important and helpful for the growth of students, especially after events that have occurred in the last five years. Thank You

Lauren Warfield

[REDACTED]

New York, New York 10011

March 10, 2025

Lauren Warfield

NYC City Council

Dear New York City City Council,

I am Lauren Warfield, a graduate student studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to you as a concerned citizen who believes funding for nutrition education within New York City public schools needs to be maintained, if not increased.

In New York City, despite 40% of public school students being overweight or obese, 40% of schools still lack a food education program¹. The lack of education and the current health status of these children increases their likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and a multitude of other chronic diseases². Such diseases and nutrition-related chronic diseases can then negatively impact young Americans' physical and cognitive development. Research shows childhood obesity is related to "reduced executive function, attention, mental rotation, mathematics, and reading achievements"³. This shows how imperative it is to address the health epidemic among American adolescents and the value of nutrition education.

Food Ed Hub works effortlessly to ensure that all New York City students have quality food and nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food⁴. To do this, Food Ed Hub engages and encourages children to explore food systems while providing a safe and supportive learning environment led by food and nutrition education organizations. Such programs are vital as nutrition education is critical in educating and developing individuals' dietary decisions and health. Studies indicate that adolescents with a higher level of self-efficacy for healthy eating consume healthier foods, as exhibited by a higher intake of fruits and vegetables⁵. This indicates how nutrition education is vital to ensure the healthy development of New York City adolescents.

Maintaining and increasing funding for the Food Ed Hub is critical when looking at education and evaluating ways to nutritionally support New Yorkers of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and economic statuses. As of 2025, 1 in 4 children in New York City are

¹ Shen-Berro, J. (2023, June 6). *More food education and plant-based foods: Here is NYC's vision for healthier students*. Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2023/6/6/23751434/nyc-school-food-healthy-eating-mayor-eric-adams-vegan-friday-cafeteria-kitchen/#:~:text=Currently%2C%2081%20of%20the%20more,healthier%20food%20choices%20and%20behaviors.>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, July 15). *Consequences of Obesity*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html/>

³ Wang, C., Chan, J. S., Ren, L., & Yan, J. H. (2016). Obesity Reduces Cognitive and Motor Functions across the Lifespan. *Neural plasticity*, 2016, 2473081. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/2473081>

⁴ *Food ed hub: Tisch Food Center: Teachers College, Columbia University*. Teachers College - Columbia University. (n.d.). <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/tisch/food-ed-hub/>

⁵ Brown, R., Seabrook, J. A., Stranges, S., Clark, A. F., Haines, J., O'Connor, C., Doherty, S., & Gilliland, J. A. (2021). Examining the Correlates of Adolescent Food and Nutrition Knowledge. *Nutrients*, 13(6), 2044. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13062044>

experiencing food insecurity⁶. In light of this, there has been an increase in SNAP participants and the number of individuals visiting food pantries; nutrition education empowers individuals to make more informed, budget-friendly, and nutritious decisions that improve their overall health. As a result, the maintenance and increase in funding for Food Ed Hub would ensure that collaboration with food education providers throughout the city is prioritized to ensure nutrition education in all areas is established.

In conclusion, supporting and maintaining the funding for Food Ed Hub is not simply educating our youth but a vital step in protecting and ensuring the well-being of future generations. As both a concerned citizen and future nutrition professional, I believe that the continued incorporation of nutrition education and advocacy for proper adolescent health is critical to ensure that all children have access to resources available to maintain adequate health status. I urge the New York City City Council to recognize their decisive role in this decision and the importance of the Food Ed Hub in NYC public schools.

Sincerely,
Lauren Warfield MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University


⁶ *Hunger in NYC*. City Harvest. (2024, July 23). <https://www.cityharvest.org/hunger-in-nyc/>

My name is Leah Vickers and I am the parent of two students at PS9 in Brooklyn.

I am calling upon the New York City Council to ensure that next year's City budget includes critical funding needed for air conditioning in our public-school buildings.

My children attend a large public elementary school. Last spring, half of the classrooms at our school had air conditioning units that had either stopped functioning or were not working well enough to cool the classrooms. At the time, I was the PTO president. We learned that the school had no money in its budget to replace broken A/Cs and that the DOE also lacked the budget to replace them. As a PTO we spent \$20,000 to replace half of the broken air conditioners. By the time we did so, there was already a heat wave upon the school. The department of education offered small portable units as a makeshift solution, but they had approximately 1/3 of the BTUs needed to cool our classrooms. Moreover, our common areas, including our gym, lacked any air conditioning at all.

This is not a problem that can or should be solved at an individual school level. It is impractical and inequitable. Under Bill de Blasio's leadership, the City Council and the administration worked on a multi-year plan to survey and then equip all classrooms with air conditioners. After that initiative ended in 2022, there does not appear to have been any centrally organized and sufficiently funded plan to replace A/C units as they break and to upgrade common spaces so that gyms, cafeterias and auditoriums are also cooled.

This is a question of safety, health, and equity. All schools should have adequate air conditioning, regardless of whether their community has the resources to purchase units or apply for participatory budgeting funds, which can be used for central air upgrades.

It is for this reason that I am asking the council to do four things: (1) work with the School Construction Authority and the Division of School Facilities to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study and survey of air conditioning needs in all New York City public schools; (2) include a line of funding of at least \$25 million in next year's budget to support the feasibility study and survey of needs and to address the most urgent air conditioning needs, including making funds available to individual schools as needed to repair and replace window units (the de Blasio initiative ultimately cost over \$400 million, so we expect \$25 million would just be a start) (3) work to expand the list of approved air conditioning vendors so that equipment can be obtained at competitive prices; and (4) work with the City administration to develop a long-term plan to provide our public school buildings with all necessary upgrades and maintenance to keep schools adequately cooled in upcoming years.

Leslie A. Puebla



East Elmhurst, NY 11370

March 14, 2025

Education Committee
New York City Council, City Hall
New York, NY 10027

Dear Council Member Rita Joseph,

My name is Leslie Puebla, I am a fellow New Yorker and currently a graduate student at Teachers College, Columbia University studying Nutrition and Public Health. I am writing to advocate that your office strongly considers enhancing support for Food Ed Programs and Partners. Specifically, I am asking that you consider increasing funding for food ed programming in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS).

Increased food ed programming in NYCPS is critical now more than ever. Childhood obesity continues to be on the rise with approximately 1 in 5 U.S. children and adolescents having obesity¹. Moreover, childhood obesity disproportionately impacts low-income and minority children². It is imperative we increase funding for food ed programming in NYCPS because research shows that food preferences shaped at a young age typically persist into adolescent and into adulthood³. By providing food ed programming in NYCPS we can encourage students to eat more fruits and vegetables ultimately shaping healthier eating habits.

As I mentioned, I am a fellow New Yorker and attended public schools my entire life. During my time at P.S. 148Q, I.S. 145Q, and Queens Vocational Technical High School, I did not receive a single nutrition education class. While there were several factors that contributed to my childhood and adolescent obesity, I truly believe exposure to nutrition education would have improved my health and wellbeing at an earlier age. During my senior year of high school, I was diagnosed with nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and I remember feeling so much shame and having nowhere to turn for support or education. At the time, I did not understand how diet can adversely impact one's health. Fast forward to my senior year of college, I took a nutrition course that transformed the trajectory of my life and of my family ultimately leading me to pursue a career in Nutrition and Public Health. I am deeply committed to advocating for food sovereignty and nutrition security. I envision a world where children and families have access to nourishing and culturally relevant foods.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Childhood obesity facts. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Updated February 18, 2022. Accessed March 13, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood-obesity-facts/childhood-obesity-facts.html>

² Metoyer BN, Chuang R-J, Lee M, Markham C, Brown E, Almohamad M, Dave JM, Sharma SV. Fruit and Vegetable Shopping Behavior and Intake among Low-Income Minority Households with Elementary-Aged Children. *Children*. 2023; 10(1):82. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10010082>

³ Małachowska A, Jeżewska-Zychowicz M. Does Examining the Childhood Food Experiences Help to Better Understand Food Choices in Adulthood?. *Nutrients*. 2021;13(3):983. Published 2021 Mar 18. doi:10.3390/nu13030983

Now, I write to you as an older sister. I have a nine-year-old brother and 13-year-old sister who both attend public school. I have witnessed increased efforts throughout the years of food ed programming in their schools, yet it is not enough. I want to highlight an organization that has had a tremendous impact in our community called Brighter Bites. Through this program, students received nutrition education, and their families were able to pick up a bag of produce which included recipes to try out and written materials on eating seasonally and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. I vividly remember my siblings recalling ‘Go, Slow, and Woah’ foods, a strategy taught to help children identify and categorize foods one should have more of, less of, and be wary of. To this day, we continue to use this strategy to help my siblings make better eating choices. Brighter Bites is no longer offered at their school, and it is a shame students and families are no longer able to benefit from this wonderful program. My brother has not received nutrition education over two years now and my sister has sporadically received nutrition education in middle school. We must increase funding for food ed programming, our communities are counting us.

In conclusion, I am grateful for NYC’s efforts in increasing food ed programming within NYCPS. Now, I am asking that you please consider increasing funding for food ed programming to help educate and support more communities throughout NYC who could greatly benefit from nutrition education. Food education helps children, families, and communities adopt healthier eating habits which can help reduce the risk of developing diet-related chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure and diabetes⁴. Together we can strive towards helping children, families, and communities live long and healthy lives. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Leslie Puebla, M.S. Student, Nutrition and Public Health
Teachers College, Columbia University

[REDACTED]

⁴ New York City Department of Education. Food education in NYC public schools. New York City Department of Education. Published March 14, 2025. Accessed March 13, 2025. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/students-and-schools/food-education-in-nyc-public-schools>

Lindsay Meloni

Brooklyn, NY, 11201

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I understand that 3K was originally created for "low income" families but the reality is that most families in New York need an affordable care option as childcare costs are simply not realistic or sustainable. I spend \$50K a year on childcare - it is 25% of my salary. I am a single parent and have no trust fund, partner or other financial cushion to rely on to offset or share this cost. Even with a 6 figure salary, I have had to forgo eating, traveling to see family, and spending time with friends as every single discretionary dollar I earn goes towards childcare. If, for whatever reason, you choose not to restore 3K funding, then you must move dollars towards subsidizing daycare, allowing for daycare centers in more office buildings, capping the cost of private schools, etc. You must find a way to subsidize care for parents as we are being crippled under these costs and struggling to manage the lasting and painful impact of them on our financial futures and daily realities.

I understand that 3K was originally created for "low income" families but the reality is that most families in New York need an affordable care option as childcare costs are simply not realistic or sustainable. I spend \$50K a year on childcare - it is 25% of my salary. I am a single parent and have no trust fund, partner or other financial cushion to rely on to offset or share this cost. Even with a 6 figure salary, I have had to forgo eating, traveling to see family, and spending time with friends as every single discretionary dollar I earn goes towards childcare. If, for whatever reason, you choose not to restore 3K funding, then you must move dollars towards subsidizing daycare, allowing for daycare centers in more office buildings, capping the cost of private schools, etc. You must find a way to subsidize care for parents as we are being crippled under these costs and struggling to manage the lasting and painful impact of them on our financial futures and daily realities.



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Testimony of Lorens Rodriquez, 11th grade student:

Good Afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lorens Rodriguez and I am a junior at The Global Learning Collaborative. As part of the Generation Citizen civics program that we partner with, I am here today to share my concern on the budget cuts to NYC DOE schools special education programs.

As the eldest sibling in my family, with one younger sister and a brother, I have seen how crucial these programs are—not just for education, but for working families as well. My mother, like many parents, depends on schools and after school programs where kids are able to do their homework and participate in fun activities while being provided with a safe, structured and fun environment, as she works as a home attendant and takes care of daily responsibilities.

Cutting funding to such programs would result in countless families like mine struggling with fewer options for childcare, education, and support services. This would be devastating to my family.

Additionally, these cuts will harm students' learning and development as many children rely on early education to build foundational skills. Personally, I experienced most of my elementary school journey in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, but I can say that although I didn't get to experience the early education programs in this city, the after school programs I was able to be apart of did play a role in my academic journey, where I was given support for my homework assignments but was also able to develop new hobbies and a love for the arts, which is why I applied to the school I now attend. Without these programs, kids will be joining school unprepared, making the transition harder and widening the achievement gap.

Programs like these, I believe, have played an immense role in helping me become the honor roll student I am now, to have the courage as a 16 year old to testify in front of the City Council. Moreover, I believe the clubs and afterschool programs that I've attended, such as Model UN, Mock Trial, and Student Gov't have also helped me academically and socially, providing me with an opportunity to come outside of my comfort zone and really put myself out there. While also gaining knowledge and an experience that will help me shape my future.

If the goal is to invest in our city's future, then I believe cutting funding from education is the wrong move. I urge the city to prioritize our schools, support working families and ensure every child has access to the resources they need to succeed. Thank You.

February 9, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Lori Franco, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts. As a full-time graduate student and part-time worker it's difficult to find the funds to pay for daycare when we are JUST making ends meet.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Lori Franco
Parent and Advocate

Magdalen Stockdale

Brooklyn, NY, 11222

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The high cost of childcare has a significant impact on my household, the number of children we are able to have, and our ability to stay and invest in New York City, which I have called home for over 20+ years. We have purchased a condo in the city, which we can afford with one child and although we want another, we would likely need more space at some point and are unsure if we can afford it along with additional child care costs.

Monthly full-time childcare costs equate to a 2nd mortgage and my husband's entire monthly salary, with another child we do not know how we would afford it. My husband will need to cut back on working hours as we cannot afford full-time childcare (which also results in less taxable income for the city). We want to stay in the city, in our neighborhood and continue to invest and grow in NYC but childcare costs is currently the single biggest worry to us as a family in the city. Although we do not qualify for reduced childcare costs, we also cannot afford current private early childcare based on our combined income.



Testimony of Martin Gloster, Social Studies Teacher:

Good Afternoon Council Members,

My name is Martin Gloster and I teach a variety of social studies classes at The Global Learning Collaborative, which is a small public high school in the Brandeis campus on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

I am here in partnership with the fantastic Generation Citizen action community-based civics program and as a very proud teacher, to support these five incredible students to my right as they testify before you. And I am also here as a deeply concerned educator to implore this council not to cut funding for mental health services in our city's budget.

The mental health crisis among our youth is real, it is growing, and it is much more urgent than has been reported. This crisis mainly stems from the Covid pandemic, which has crushed a generation of kids, and the effects of their addictive cell phone & social media use.

Presently, our schools are at a breaking point because the past several years have left an indelible mark on the mental well-being of all young people. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among teenagers are at all-time highs. I see these effects every day in the classroom and quite frankly, I am overwhelmed. I often struggle to do my job on a daily basis, which is to teach social studies content and skills, because I am primarily playing the role of a therapist for the majority of my teaching periods. As a result, I feel like I am teaching in a triage-like situation and the effects of that are not sustainable for anyone.

Thus, I am asking the City Council to not cut funding for mental health services, but rather increase them.

I am lucky that my school has numerous fantastic counselors and social workers to help me as best as they possibly can navigate to this crisis. Therefore, It is critical that we are able to continue to fund the mental health counselors that my school employed post-Covid. They are critical to countering the effects of Covid isolation and social media, and the impact of these cuts on mental health services can not be understated. The majority of students at my school already face significant challenges outside of the classroom, and school may be the only place that they actually receive any mental health support.

Our city cannot afford to abandon its children. If we claim to care about education, and the future of New York, then we must act accordingly. Maintaining and expanding mental health services for youth must be a priority in this budget.

In closing, I urge this Council to do the right thing: protect mental health funding. Protect our children. Protect our future. Thank you for your time.

March 5, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Maya Azran, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to

urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services. As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts. Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Maya Azran

Parent and Advocate

January 28, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Meghan Bernhardt, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Meghan Bernhardt

Parent and Advocate

Melissa Guerrero

Middle Village, NY, 11379

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It would be nearly impossible for my husband and I to have two children in daycare/preschool. The cost would be upwards of 40,000 a year. It's critical that we receive 3K for free.

It would be nearly impossible for my husband and I to have two children in daycare/preschool. The cost would be upwards of 40,000 a year. It's critical that we receive 3K for free.

Hi, My name is Merlin Perez. I go to an girl's school in Astoria, Queens, and I am a youth leader for CAE Pact activist and a member of Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York, a coalition of over 20 New York City-based organizations consisting of students, parents, educators, and advocates who work to create a system of school discipline and safety that is based on mutual respect and problem-solving and to end the school to prison pipeline.

As a student, I am here to support my peers and important work because we want the city to fully fund meaningful Restorative Justice programs, and divest from school police and surveillance.

I want New York City to have public schools that recognize all the students and can offer them things that help them expand their knowledge and help them reach goals that they want to achieve. Unfortunately, we currently spend too much money on school police, close to 400 million, and that could be better spent on support and services.

We need to fully fund restorative justice and mental health resources in our school now. I sometimes fear that something can happen in our schools with a student which can be avoided or prevented if there were more programs restorative justice practices and mental health resources in school. The money we spend on policing in schools we can be using that money for fund programs, and academics. If something were to happen many people would be left with a memory and pain that can cause trauma and people to struggle mentally or emotionally. .

And in my school, I'm uncertain of who I can reach out to and who I can trust, because there hasn't been enough sense of community. Restorative justice focuses on community building because realistically there cannot be justice without community and without the community coming together.

So we have to get to the root of the problem. Additionally, my school has three counselors but as of right now one of them is on maternity leave. Knowing how much the school counselors have on their plate adding more counselors, would not only be a benefit for other students but also take pressure off the counselors. We are calling on the city council to expand school-based restorative justice and social-emotional support, including investing \$80 million in hiring school-based Restorative Justice Coordinators in 500 schools. We can fund this expansion of mental health and academic resources in schools if we redirect money currently going to policing. Thank you

Testimony Submitted by:
Merrell Quintin, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

My name is Merrell Quintin, and I am a graduate student in nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. As a concerned citizen deeply committed to the health and wellbeing of New York City's children and families, I am writing to urge your support for increased funding to expand food access and nutrition education, particularly in our lower-income communities.

I strongly support the Food Ed Coalition Policy Priorities for 2026, which aim to advance food and nutrition education across NYC communities. The Food Ed Coalition is a diverse group of advocates, program leaders, community members, and other stakeholders, organized under the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy. Among the coalition's many important priorities, I am especially passionate about securing sustained funding to expand food access and further enhance nutrition education programs in public schools, particularly for students from underserved communities.

To truly strengthen the work of Food Ed in NYC, we must renew funding to foster collaboration among community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide food education. Sustaining and expanding this network will ensure that more students, especially those from low-income, housing-insecure, and single-parent households, receive the nutrition education they need to build healthier lives. These efforts should also be part of a broader, strategic framework to advance the Food Ed Coalition's growth while aligning with NYC's goals to support food-insecure communities, without relying solely on City Council funding. All these efforts aim to improve nutrition security, especially for NYC PS students.

Beyond funding for continued support, the need for increased funding for Food Ed programs is critical. Research has consistently shown that nutrition education, paired with access to healthy meals, significantly improves physical health, mental wellbeing and academic performance (nih.com, 2021). For instance, when students get school meals every day, they consume more fruits, vegetables, fiber, and whole grains. This not only leads to better immediate health outcomes, but also fosters healthier relationships with food that will carry on into adulthood. Additional funding will allow more CBOs to expand their outreach, enabling them to serve more students in public schools. This funding would also support the hiring of qualified staff, purchase of necessary educational materials, and development of culturally relevant, high-quality food and nutrition education for many vulnerable communities throughout NYC. Furthermore, this funding will enable tailored program evaluations to measure the effectiveness and impact of these food education initiatives, ensuring continued improvements.

Food insecurity in NYC remains a pressing issue. One in four children in NYC face uncertainty about where their next meal will come from (City Harvest, 2024). Research shows that food-

insecure New Yorkers are more likely to report poor health than their food-secure counterparts (NY Health Survey, 2022). The importance of programs like those supported by the Food Ed Coalition cannot be overstated. They are essential not only for addressing food insecurity but also for laying the foundation for healthier, more resilient communities and generations of New Yorkers.

I respectfully ask that you consider the proposed funding for the Food Ed Coalition's policy priorities as part of your ongoing commitment to support food security and nutrition education in our city. These programs are a vital part of the efforts to combat food insecurity, improve public health, and empower our young people to thrive. Thank you for your attention and consideration in your continued dedication for the wellbeing of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,
Merrell Quintin

[REDACTED]

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Food Ed Coalition at Tisch Food Center: <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/tisch/food-ed-hub/>

Good afternoon my name is Mololuwa Fasola and I'm currently a junior at forest hills high school. I am a youth leader for an organization named the circled keeper which aims to bring restorative justice into schools and communities and help dismantle the school to prison pipeline. I am here to advocate with the circle keepers for the city to fully fund 80 million dollars for the continuation of restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools as well as five million for the mental health continuum. These funds will not only keep students safe and protected in their schools but also provide them the mental health services and education they deserve. During my time in this program it has educated me on the importance and effectiveness restorative justice has done to our youth. Restorative justice values the elimination of punitive methods and fights to create and build a community derived off of trust and inclusion. These approaches have been proven to decrease fighting and bullying in school, improve students behavior, and reduce the rate at which students get suspended and expelled. My school on the other hand consistently uses punitive approaches as their way to discipline students. As you can imagine this doesn't solve the root of the problem and keeps kids in the cycle of fighting, being disruptive in class, and simply cutting school in general. In relation to this it can cause many students to see a downward spike in their mental health leaving them left with anxiety and depression. No student will feel happy and safe knowing they go to a hostile school and the administration does not solve the root of the issue. All these examples further support my claim as to why both restorative justice practices and mental health continuum should be essential for schools to implement. This will continue to foster a safe and supportive environment for all students to attend. When students receive the necessary guidance and attention they yearn for they are less likely to partake in any harmful or dangerous activities as well as focus on their crucial mental health. I know these funds will go towards making school a safer and more engaging environment for students to fully express themselves and live up to their capabilities. We are demanding that the city should fund 800 million dollars in restorative justice coordinators as well as 5 million in mental health continuum. With this shift us students will finally stop living in fear and as criminals but for the talented and creative people we should be nurtured for.

Good afternoon, my name is Muhammad Mujahid, a member of KAFSCs YCPT group, and I am here today because this budget is not just about dollars and cents , it is about children, about families, about the future of New York City. And at this very moment, our city is deciding to take \$400 million away from our schools. That's not just a number. That is a choice to deny kids the opportunity they most need.

New York City's public schools enroll more than 920,000 students, and about one in five — 18.7 percent — are Asian American and Pacific Islander. These cuts will directly affect programs that so many students and families depend on:

- \$197 million is cut from 3-K and Pre-K despite 17.5% of early childhood students being AAPI and depending on such programs.
- \$114 million cut from CUNY while 22% of CUNY students are AAPI and need affordable, quality higher education.
- \$41 million slashed from arts education, in a city renowned for its culture and creativity.
- \$10 million cut from teacher recruitment when we are already short-staffed — especially among AAPI educators, who make up only 8% of all teachers while almost 19% of our students are Asian.
- \$5 million cut from mental health programs when 80% of Asian American teens report having been bullied, in person or online, and suicide is the leading cause of death for Asian Americans ages 15 to 24.

These cuts are not only hurting students today — they are laying a foundation for failure across our entire city tomorrow. What do we expect children to do when we take away their teachers, their counselors, their supportive systems? How do we tell them they matter when we're taking away the very resources they need to succeed?

Education is not a cost, it's an investment. When we fund schools, we fund the future scientists, teachers, doctors, and leaders of New York City. When we cut education, we shorten that future. It is a choice, and we must choose to keep our children safe.

I call for the Council to reinstate this funding. We cannot risk the future of close to a million students. The children of New York need so much more. Our city deserves better. And let's not only talk about opportunity, let's ensure every child has it.

Thank you.

Nadhifa Ramadhani

[REDACTED]

New York, NY, 10025

March, 14th 2025

Dear New York City Council,

Sustaining and Expanding Food Education and Access for NYC's Most Vulnerable Communities

As a graduate student in nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University, my academic and professional journey has shown me the transformative power of food and nutrition education in improving health outcomes and empowering individuals to make informed dietary choices. However, access to such education remains uneven, particularly for New York City's most vulnerable populations. To address this disparity, I urge the renewal of funding for the Food Ed Hub and Coalition and the expansion of Food Access & Summer Nutrition Opportunities. These initiatives are critical to ensuring that all students, especially those from low-income families, housing-insecure households, and single-parent families, have the tools they need to lead healthier lives.

1. Sustain the Food Ed Hub and Coalition

The Food Ed Hub has been instrumental in fostering collaboration among food education providers and advocating for policies that expand access to nutrition education. By renewing funding for this vital network (\$250,000), we can strengthen its impact and ensure that more students receive the food and nutrition education they deserve.

Research consistently demonstrates that nutrition education improves dietary habits and health outcomes. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found that students who participated in nutrition education programs significantly increased their intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains while reducing their consumption of sugary beverages and processed foods (Contento et al., 2010). These changes are critical for preventing diet-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, which disproportionately affect low-income communities.

As someone studying nutrition, I have seen how education can empower individuals to make healthier choices, even with limited resources. By sustaining the Food Ed Hub, we can ensure that more students gain the knowledge and skills they need to break the cycle of food insecurity and poor health.

2. Expand Food Access & Summer Nutrition Opportunities

Summer is a particularly challenging time for food-insecure families, as children lose access to school meals. Expanding support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support with Food Ed Programming is essential to bridging this gap. However, to truly maximize the impact

of these programs, we must address the unique barriers that arise during the summer months, such as transportation issues and limited access to meal sites.

I propose implementing a "Mobile Food Education and Meal Delivery" initiative. This program would deploy mobile units—equipped with nutritious meals and educational materials—to neighborhoods with high rates of food insecurity. At each stop, students would receive meals alongside engaging, age-appropriate nutrition education activities, such as interactive games, cooking demonstrations, or gardening workshops. For example, students could learn how to grow herbs or vegetables in small containers, tying the lessons to practical, at-home applications.

Additionally, partnering with local community organizations and libraries could create pop-up meal and education hubs in safe, familiar spaces. This approach not only ensures consistent access to healthy meals but also keeps students engaged and learning during the summer break. By bringing meals and education directly to students, this initiative addresses the logistical challenges of summer programming while fostering a sense of community and empowerment.

My academic and professional journey in nutrition has deepened my understanding of the systemic barriers that prevent equitable access to healthy food and nutrition education. I have seen how food insecurity and lack of education perpetuate health disparities, particularly in underserved communities. By investing in the Food Ed Hub and expanding summer nutrition opportunities, we can take meaningful steps toward addressing these inequities and fostering a healthier, more equitable New York City.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing this letter. Let us prioritize the health and well-being of our most vulnerable students by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and expanding access to summer nutrition programs.

Sincerely,
Nadhifa Ramadhani

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Nathan Levy

New York, NY, 10010

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We need to fully find childcare in NY State because my family and friends have spent 55 percent of our income on childcare. This needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Olivia Robie
[REDACTED]
New York, NY 10024

Testimony Submitted by:
Olivia Robie, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

U.S. Senate Committee on Education
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building, Washington, D.C.
March 11th, 2025

Dear U.S. Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Olivia Robie, and I am a graduate student studying Nutrition and Public Health at Teachers College, Columbia University. As a deeply concerned New York State resident, I witness the effects of limited access to summer meals for students and communities, experiencing food insecurity through working with public school students. I am writing to urge you to strengthen food access programs in schools and expand support for initiatives like Summer Rising, which provides both summer meals and food education for children in need.

Programs like Summer Rising have been impactful in ensuring that students continue receiving nutritious meals and hands-on food education experiences when school is out. However, gaps remain that hinder their full impact. I strongly encourage policies that mandate a designated meal period before dismissal or ensure that meals are integrated into instructional programming. These adjustments will help guarantee that children—especially those from food-insecure households—have consistent access to healthy food and meaningful nutrition education year-round.

Food insecurity during the summer months contributes to poor health outcomes, academic learning loss, and increased disparities among low-income children (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2023), over 30 million children rely on free or reduced-price lunch during the school year, yet only a fraction, approximately 14%, receive free summer meals through federal programs (Food Research & Action Center, 2022). This gap worsened nutritional deficiencies and places additional strain on families struggling to provide consistent, healthy meals. Research indicates that food-insecure children are at a higher risk of developmental impairments, obesity, and chronic illnesses, which can have lifelong consequences (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022). By expanding and strengthening summer food programs, we can mitigate these adverse effects, ensuring that every child has the nourishment needed to thrive both academically and physically.

Furthermore, investing in these initiatives will yield significant economic and social benefits. Reducing childhood food insecurity leads to lower healthcare costs, improved school performance, and better long-term workforce productivity (Cook & Frank, 2008). By prioritizing funding and policy support for summer meal programs, we are not only addressing immediate hunger concerns but also laying the foundation for a healthier, more equitable future.

I urge you to support policies that improve summer meal programs. Expanding these programs is an important step toward making sure all children in New York have access to the food they need, no matter the season.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing your response and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further. Please feel free to reach me at

[REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Olivia Robie

[REDACTED]

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February 8, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Paul Snyder, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community.

I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive.

Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk.

Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
Paul Snyder
Parent and Advocate

March 10, 2025

Re: Provide 3K and PreK seats through **Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids**

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Puichun Li, and I am a parent of two children and reside in Sunset Park. I'm submitting testimony to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like **Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids**, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

I sent both of my children to **Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids** for daycare because it is a safe and nurturing environment. My children have played, learned, and socialized under the direction of the amazing teachers and administrators. My husband and I are able to keep our full time jobs because we know they are well taken care of and they provide late pick-up. However, many families struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is seeking approval for their program to include a DOE funded 3K to continue to provide high quality bilingual education to the children in our community. I am concerned that the roll back of the 3K expansion will prevent this program and other programs like it from continuing to serve our community. When searching for a 3K spot for my child, I was struck by the lack of options in the neighborhood that offered reliable and quality aftercare.

In this budget season, we ask you to continue to invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services and facilitating licenses to beloved neighborhood institutions like Pantomima. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Puichun Li
Parent and Advocate

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed education budget. My name is Qin Lin, and I am a **parent of preschool student with disabilities attending a 4410 special education preschool in Brooklyn.**

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

As a parent of a preschool student with a disability it is crucial for my child to have teachers in our school to teach my child. My child is making progress talking and that is all thanks to our 4410 preschool special education teacher.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

- \$55 Million for preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities
- and
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ms Qin Lin of Brooklyn, New York.

February 10, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Rachel Caraballo, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I am here to urge you the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services. As a parent I couldn't be happier with my decision to enroll my son at Pantomima. From the moment we walked in, we were welcomed with warmth and professionalism, and it was clear that this daycare goes beyond just providing care they create an environment where children thrive. The staff is incredibly nurturing, attentive, patient and genuinely passionate about the children's development.

What truly sets Pantomima apart is its unique approach to early childhood education through the arts, particularly theater. The creative activities they offer help foster our son's imagination, social skills, and confidence. It's been amazing to see how he's blossomed, expressing himself through storytelling and play, and developing a love for learning that we know will serve him well in the future. Every day, he's excited to go, which speaks volumes about the positive and engaging atmosphere the team has created. I also appreciate how Pantomima encourages individuality and creates a strong sense of community, allowing children to form lasting friendships. The communication with parents is transparent and consistent, giving me a peace of mind that my son is in great hands.

Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the proper funding, this growth and the educational opportunities it brings, are at risk.

Please invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families, and New York City's future, depend on it.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Rachel Caraballo.

Parent and Advocate.

March 13th, 2025

Rachel Carson

MS-RDN Candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University

600 West 140th St, New York, NY, 10031

Members of the New York City Council Committee on Education

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee,

Support to Expand Summer Rising Programs

I am writing as a student currently studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University, to express my plea to expand support for Summer Rising. These programs have been vital to New York City students, providing them with reliable access to nutritious meals along with hands-on nutrition education experiences. To maximize the program's impact in the summer months, there should be an additional meal period included before dismissal or served followed by instruction. In my experience as an intern with Edible Schoolyard NYC, I have experienced first hand how nutrition education and a reliable food source can positively impact a child. Through this experience, I have witnessed the critical role food security plays in a child's ability to learn and thrive.

Currently, at P.S. 109 Sedwick, the school I have been interning at, has a 100% participation rate in free school lunches during the academic year. While working at the school with Edible Schoolyard NYC I have seen how the flow of food with nutrition education can help build a healthy relationship with children's food and themselves. Just the other day I got to teach some kids about different food groups, after that it was time for their lunch, and though many of them had lunch boxes, very few had anything in them and if they did they had some kind of ultra processed food, which is often consumed in food insecure households. With this in mind, when their summer break starts, their food insecurity will be exacerbated. This is because many of these children come from low-income families, so for many of them school meals may be their only reliable source of nutrition during the year, which has been backed by research (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2018).

Summer Rising helps bridge this gap, allowing students to continue receiving nutritious and hands-on food education experiences when school is out for the summer. The program has already had meaningful impact which has shown in improved fall screener scores (Research & Policy Support Group & Metis Associates, 2025). This is consistent with research that shows how consistent and nutritious meals improve cognitive function, focus and academic performance. Which is important to consider especially when there are studies which show that losing meals in the summer disproportionately affects low-income students, and a lack of nutrition will further aggravate academic disparities (Frongillo, Jyoti & Jones, 2019). With that being said, to maximize the program's impact I urge the committee to require for either including an additional meal period before dismissal, ensuring that children get a full day of food, or that an additional meal be served in conjunction with instructional time so students can receive additional education and recreational time, so in addition to fulfilling their nutritional needs for the day, parents can complete a full work day. These changes will help ensure that students,

especially those in food-insecure households have consistent access to healthy food year round. With all this being said I urge you to do the following:

1. Continue and increase funding for Summer Rising to support the thousands of NYC students who face food insecurity
2. Require that an additional meal period is included before dismissal or in conjunction with nutrition education to ensure consistent meal accessibility

I hope you continue to support Summer Rising, and strengthen the programs offered. As providing meals and nutrition education is not just an investment in summer programming, but an investment in equity, health, and the future of our children by ensuring no child in New York City goes hungry during all our future summers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rachel Carson

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Testimony Submitted By:
Rachel Laemle, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Ms. Rita Joseph
250 Broadway, Suite 1752 New York, Ny 10007
March 13, 2025

Dear Ms. Joseph,

My name is Rachel Laemle, and I am a first year Master's in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology student at Teacher's College, Columbia University. I am writing to you as the Chair of the Education Committee of the NY City Council. I am a concerned student and NYC public school volunteer who witnesses the need for improvement in nutrition education. \$3 million to expand food ed programming in 100 additional NYCPS and to provide professional development opportunities for staff would improve overall academic performance and cognitive functioning in children. It's crucial to have nutrition knowledge throughout life for optimal health and wellness.

Senator Robert Jackson stated, "every child deserves the opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle, beginning with the food they consume." Only 190 of 1800 public schools, or about 11%, currently receive food ed grants. Grant funding enables multiple classes in food education to be offered. In 2023, 56% of NYC K-12 public schools had at least one food education program while 44% lacked even one. Programs are not consistent, ranging from a single school-wide workshop to more extensive lessons. While school meals are provided, the inequity in nutritional education is putting students at a disadvantage; Not knowing what they are being served can cause students to avoid vegetables and proteins on their plate or eat the same nutrients at home. About 40% of NYC public school children are overweight or obese, making it important to act immediately, as these students are at risk of chronic diseases and lower academic performance.

In 2023, Mayor Adams proposed an extensive food education roadmap which identified three goals for improving food education across NYCPS. The proposal provided ideas for achieving these visions, including a Food Education Guidebook and professional development for educators. As a dietetics student, I not only believe that funding can expand nutrition programming but employ registered dietitians to share accurate information with staff. Teachers can't be expected to become experts in nutrition, and the misunderstanding of nutrition concepts is far too much; Mayor Adams said, "I know the power of healthy eating firsthand: Switching to a plant-based diet reversed the effects of my type 2 diabetes and saved my eyesight." Not every diet works for everyone. Experts need to educate the public, not those in political power.

In the 2023-24 school year, it was planned for 60 schools to be awarded \$11,000 each to support the expansion of nutrition education. The funding I am recommending will cover an additional 40 schools to this proposal with more resources to create productive programs that will benefit

public-school children. This policy change will especially impact those from homes with food insecurity and limited access to healthy options. Additionally, many of these students have family members with numerous diet-related diseases.

I have witnessed Plant-Powered Friday at a NYCPS, where toddlers were eating their lunch consisting of pasta, squash, milk, a banana, and lentils. This is representative of the legislation bringing plant-based options to public schools statewide. Educating students on what and why they are eating lentils will benefit them in the long run, not just serving the food. I had a conversation with the four-year olds about what was on their plate. They only named the pasta and banana, not the vegetable or protein source. This implies the children do not know or like nutritious options.

In conclusion, supporting the enhancement of food education in NYCPS is a necessary step to establishing a healthy and high achieving youth population. As a concerned master's student, I believe implementing this change is required to ensure academic success and bright futures for students. I ask the NYC Council to please comprehend the importance of this policy. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel Laemle, MS-RDN Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University
[REDACTED]

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Rosa, Gold-Watts

Kew Gardens,NY, 11415

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As someone who has no immediate family to help take care of my son, we could not have survived without 3K. It was a lifesaver for us financially and a way to allow my child to learn and socialize in a school setting.

As a family where both parents work, 3K was vital to us being able to stay in the work force and afford our expenses. After paying for 2K, we know how many sacrifices we would have to make if we did not get a 3K slot, and as a middle class family, the cost was significant. 3K allowed us the freedom to maintain our jobs (as small business owners this also was vital for our own local economy). It was a vital lifeline to remaining in NYC as a family, and I know It will be for many other families

Ruzica Kizic

[REDACTED]

Astoria, NY, 11103

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am writing to express my support for and request the continued expansion of the 2-K program in New York City. As a parent, I believe that providing free early childhood education for two-year-olds is an essential step toward helping families thrive, both financially and emotionally.

The cost of private daycare or early childhood education is prohibitively expensive for many families. It places a heavy burden on parents, especially those with young children, and often forces families to make difficult financial decisions. By offering free education for two-year-olds, the city would significantly ease this financial strain and provide children with the opportunity to begin their educational journey in a nurturing and supportive environment.

New York City is one of the wealthiest cities in the world, and it is only fair that resources be allocated to support the families who contribute to the city's success. The 2-K program not only supports parents in need but also invests in the future of our city by ensuring that children start their educational journey on the right foot, no matter their background.

I truly believe that expanding this program will have a positive impact on families across the city, allowing parents to work without the constant worry of how they will afford quality childcare.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that you will continue to prioritize programs that support families in this city.

Testimony Submitted By:

Samantha Sharp, MS-RDN Candidate
Program of Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University

New York City Council Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

My name is Samantha Sharp and I am a graduate student in the Program of Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am writing to you with urgent concerns about the livelihoods of people within our community – for my neighbors in Harlem, and across all five boroughs. Through my studies and hands-on work in community nutrition, I have seen firsthand the impact that fresh, nutritious food has on people’s lives – at the same time, I have seen many New Yorkers, particularly those in low-income communities, struggle to find their next meal. Despite the city’s efforts to combat food insecurity, too many New Yorkers still struggle to access fresh, nutritious food. I am therefore writing to express the urgent need for increased funding for Free Health Bucks, to expand the reach of this highly-impactful program.

The NYC Health Bucks program is an initiative that has proven to be a lifeline for low-income communities who struggle to afford fresh, locally grown produce. “Health Bucks” offer \$2 coupons for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables, for every \$2 spent at farmers markets with a SNAP EBT card, at participating farmers’ markets. As of April 2024, over 20% of NYC residents were receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and would therefore be able to benefit from Health Bucks [1]. However, despite the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) receiving 600 applications from community-based organizations for Free Health Bucks in 2024, the department did not have the funding to fulfill all of these requests. Consequently, many community-based organizations are left unable to support the needs of their community members, and opportunities for SNAP recipients to use Health Bucks remain limited.

It is unacceptable that in one of the wealthiest cities in the world, over 40% of adults are living in a household at risk of food insecurity — and this number is projected to rise [2]. Consequently, Nutrition Security is ranked as the 3rd most pressing health issue by the New York State Department of Health, and Healthy Eating follows closely in 8th [3]. Increasing funding for the Health Bucks program presents an opportunity to expand its reach, allowing more organizations to receive Health Bucks that can be distributed to members of our community.

In 2025, the price of fresh fruits are predicted to increase by 11.5%, and prices for all foods are predicted to increase by 3.4%. [4]. With close friends and loved ones, and their children, relying on SNAP benefits, these are harrowing statistics. As prices rise, fruits and vegetables are the first things to go from their shopping lists, to be replaced by cheaper, calorie-dense foods. With many within my community facing battles against type 2 diabetes and obesity, I refuse to stand by and watch as healthy food becomes a luxury, rather than a basic necessity [5].

Increasing access to healthy and affordable foods and beverages falls directly under the New York State Prevention Agenda's overarching goal of reducing obesity and the risk of chronic disease [6]. For the health of our community, I once again urge you to expand the Health Bucks program. By increasing funding for Health Bucks, you will be preventing chronic disease before it starts, reducing the burden of our healthcare system, and allowing families to nourish themselves with the fresh, local produce that they, and our farmers, deserve.

Thank you for your time and leadership in making New York a city where access to healthy food is a right, not a privilege.

Sincerely,

Samantha Sharp, MS-RDN Candidate
Program of Nutrition
Teachers College, Columbia University
[REDACTED]

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February 7th, 2025

Re: Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Consideration Testimony

Good morning,

My name is Sara Cintrón Beheraj, and I am a parent in the Sunset Park community. I'm here today to urge the City Council to prioritize funding for the extension of contracts to schools and small private daycares, like Pantomima Theater-Based Care for Kids, to offer 3K and Universal Pre-K services.

As a parent, I've seen firsthand the importance of early education in shaping a child's future. My son is flourishing at Pantomima. Daycares like Pantomima not only provide high-quality care but also create nurturing environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. Unfortunately, many families, including mine, struggle to afford private daycare, and centers like Pantomima face severe financial challenges without the support of DOE contracts.

Pantomima is expanding to a second location to serve more children in our community, but without proper funding, this growth—and the educational opportunities it brings—are at risk. Please, invest in our children and our communities by extending funding for 3K and Universal Pre-K services. Our families—and New York City's future—depend on it. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Sara Cintrón Beheraj | Parent and Advocate

Good afternoon, my name is Sarah Kim and I am currently a New York City highschool student.

As a student who has been reliant on the funding provided for NYC public schools for all her life, I am vehemently opposed to the proposed cuts to our current education system. Even without these cuts, we are lacking severely in providing the proper services for our students. Therefore it is even more urgent that these cuts should not take place in order to protect the essential programs we have running so far.

Education starts early on in our childhood. Programs such as 3-K gives three-year-old children access to, as access NYC describes, “free, full-day, high-quality” education. These programs are the reason why underprivileged children can afford to go to school– which is why we cannot allow a 14% cut– costing us \$197M. 17.5% of the students in Early Childhood programs are AAPI children. We are dependent on these programs; especially for our immigrant families, who cannot afford private education or even babysitters, this program allows burdened parents to work while the children begin their educational journey early on as they should. Early education allows for children to develop skills they need to succeed later in their life; we cannot let this be taken away.

And because I am a graduating highschool senior and soon-to-be college freshman, I understand how crucial city universities are to our community. At CUNY, 14% of faculty and 22% students are AAPI. As-is, city universities already suffer from underfunding as facilities struggle to be maintained and staff are overburdened by work as their duties increase due to the understaffing caused by the lack of funding. An additional \$114M cut will only exasperate this situation. We must protect these universities and ensure that everyone, especially the underprivileged, have access to fair, quality education and employment.

Furthermore, to knock down even more barriers to education, we demand that transportation be provided for students through MetroCards, relieving students of the financial burden of daily travel expenses– especially for those living out further in the city.

As a city, we should be removing barriers from people seeking education at primary, secondary, and higher levels. We should not be discouraged from going to school because our needs cannot be met due to the penny-pinching government that casts our struggles aside. At the very least our current programs and funding *must* be protected, lest our access to education be wrestled away from our hands.

My name is Sarah Masters and I am the parent of two students at PS9 in Brooklyn.

I am writing to request that the New York City Council ensure there is sufficient funding in next year's City budget for air conditioning in **ALL** our public-school buildings.

Last spring, half of the classrooms at PS9 had air conditioning units that either stopped functioning or were not working well enough to cool the classrooms. Because the DOE lacked budget to replace them the PTO was forced to spend \$20K to replace half of them and make do with small portable machines for the remainder; those smaller machines were insufficient to cool the classrooms and common areas such as the gym did not have A/C.

This is not a problem that can or should be solved at an individual school level. It is impractical and inequitable to expect schools to cover such an expense and many will be unable to do so. Meanwhile our students and school staff will lose valuable learning time and their health will be put at risk.

It is for this reason that I am asking the council to do four things: (1) work with the School Construction Authority and the Division of School Facilities to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study and survey of air conditioning needs in all New York City public schools; (2) include a line of funding of at least \$25 million in next year's budget to support the feasibility study and survey of needs and to address the most urgent air conditioning needs, including making funds available to individual schools as needed to repair and replace window units (the de Blasio initiative ultimately cost over \$400 million, so we expect \$25 million would just be a start) (3) work to expand the list of approved air conditioning vendors so that equipment can be obtained at competitive prices; and (4) work with the City administration to develop a long-term plan to provide our public school buildings with all necessary upgrades and maintenance to keep schools adequately cooled in upcoming years.

Thank you,
Sarah Masters

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Morgridge and my comments are directed to the School Construction Authority's Capital Plan.

Every five years the SCA introduces a new capital plan. Very seldom does the City Council question its content or conclusions about where to spend billions of taxpayer dollars. I propose three strategies that will give the Council some tools to assess the capital plan. I offer these ideas from the perspective of having served as the education liaison for now Senator Robert Jackson for the 12 years he was in the City Council, 8 of which he chaired this committee, and for the subsequent two years I participated in a Chancellor's work group convened by Lorraine Grillo when she headed the SCA. I also was a member of a Manhattan Borough President's Task Force on School Overcrowding.

The City Council may not be able to mandate action but it can compel accurate reporting.

First, regarding the repair portion of the plan, because of limited funding, repairs are made only to level 4 and some level 3 issues. That seems logical but an audit could trace whether those level 4 repairs started out as level 1, 2, or 3 before they metastasized into level 4. Would it have been more cost effective to repair them earlier? To the best of my knowledge, no one has approached this with accurate data, which should be relatively easy for the SCA to provide..

Second, regarding the new capacity portion of the plan, has the Council ever requested the SCA to prepare a retroactive analysis of its demographic projections? It could be very useful to know, going back a cycle or two, just how close those projections came to reality. Actual enrollments and updated census data could pinpoint how accurate these past projections were. Can you trust them or can wild card factors like pandemics and international events make them less than reliable? Were they spot on or off the mark?

Thirdly, the single most important factor for projecting future needs is an accurate understanding of current capacity. Are NYC schools overcrowded? It's a simple equation to calculate utilization: you divide the current enrollment by the current capacity to get a percentage of building utilization. Enrollment figures are audited; capacity figures are not. I've been tracking building capacity numbers for 35 years, since my own children attended schools in Community School District 6. Overcrowding was the straw on the camel's back that led to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. If you look at building capacity numbers, you can see that our school buildings expand and contract, as if they were made of elastic or Spandex.

Here's how - when a principal of say a 500 seat elementary school is faced with an enrollment surge of say 90 additional students in a building already fully utilized, she might put up a partition in her art room, yielding 30 seats on either side. She might subdivide the library, yielding an additional 30 seats and a much reduced library.

When she fills out the annual PASS survey that forms the basis of the Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report, or colloquially The Blue Book, Room 302 which last year was the Art Room becomes 302A and 302B, both classified as classrooms. Similarly the library is now 403 A & B, and 403B is a general classroom. Since every general classroom counts toward building capacity, the principal has just added 90 seats to her building. When you do the basic math, that calculates building utilization, this building will not show up as overcrowded because those 90 additional seats cover the 90 additional

students. And after the next year's PASS, the fact that Room 302 was an art room is erased from institutional memory.

The IBO once did a report on this issue and concluded that the capacity formula was wrong but that the only way to remedy it would be to walk the halls of every school building to affirm or correct the basic capacity. While there is already a robust inspection that takes place through the BCAS or Building Conditions Annual Survey, those teams are explicitly instructed NOT to look at capacity issues.

IBO is mistaken, however. There is a simple survey that would allow both SCA and the Council to pinpoint those schools which are adversely affected by this flaw in the capacity formula. The Council can compel reporting on several key data points.

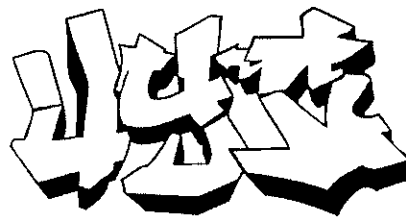
- Lunch periods - a school with under 100% utilization but needing extended time to serve lunch is most likely in this category of overutilized but under capacity.
- Physical Education and recess access - schools that are unable to offer every grade level the minimum mandated access to PE and playground access are also likely to be overcrowded.
- Specialty and cluster room access were part of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity definition of a sound, basic education. As an educator, you know there is a world of difference between Art on a Cart and art classes offered in a room designed for art instruction. Ditto science - asking students to take a Regents exam when they do not have access to an appropriate lab is simply cruel. No one has ever asked the SCA to pinpoint whether specialized instruction is taking place in a room designed to support that subject, is taking place in a regular classroom being used for the subject, or is being provided in some makeshift way. No one has asked whether specialty rooms are shared in the case of co-located schools.*

Yet these are simple and relevant data points that indicate whether this or any other capital plan is adequate or inadequate.

I know a cohort of people who have worked on this issue for years and would be happy to support you in developing such a survey, the results of which could be in your hands before the June vote on the capital budget. Please reachout to us.

Sarah Morgridge

**Some facts that the trial court classified as purely "physical" facilities inputs are inseparable from overcrowding and excessive class size -- conditions whose measurable effect on students plaintiffs have shown. One symptom of an overcrowded school system is the encroachment of ordinary classroom activities into what would otherwise be specialized spaces: libraries, laboratories, auditoriums and the like. There was considerable evidence of a shortage of such spaces. Particularly poignant is the fact that 31 New York City high schools serving more than 16,000 students have no science laboratory whatsoever. Whether this fact stems from overcrowding or from the design of some old school buildings, its direct impact on pedagogy is self-evident and it counts against the State in any assessment of the facilities input. 1 No. 74 Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., et al., Appellants, v. The State of New York, et al., Respondents. 2003 NY Int. 84 - June 26, 2003*



Urban Youth Collaborative



Good evening
Hello, my name is Sebastian. I am a senior in a community high school in Brooklyn. My pronouns are He/Him, and I'm a proud Youth Leader with Make the Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative. Our schools should be places of learning, growth, and opportunity, not fear and punishment. Mayor Adams continues to fund hundreds and hundreds of vacant school cop positions while the programs and supports we care about are facing cuts. The lengths our city is willing to go to criminalize us Black and Brown youth never fails to amaze us.

This week, the U.S. Education Department cut nearly 50% of its workforce. This is a straight up attack on ALL young people and their right to education. These cuts would eliminate protections in place for Black, brown, immigrant and trans youth like us. More than ever, we need our city to pass a budget that has our back and makes sure we have what we need. That listens to us when we say school cops don't make us safe. Millions of dollars are wasted on school policing, money that could be better spent on the resources we need, like funding for tutoring programs that give every student a real opportunity to succeed. We need teachers and support staff who can help us more. Our schools also need up-to-date technology and textbooks - we cannot learn from outdated, falling-apart materials.

Services and programs we count on, such as Community Schools, restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, and Student Success Centers, are at risk of being cut from the budget this year. That is not okay! We need NYC to do better and step up. School policing has never made my school community safer. Instead, it has created an environment where students feel watched, controlled, and criminalized. For undocumented students, it's even worse, knowing that school police can collaborate with ICE means that one wrong move could put their families at risk. And even for those of us who are citizens, police in schools mean being treated as suspects instead of students.

I know this because it has happened to me. I've been stopped, searched, and delayed from getting to class by school police. I've been held back from my AP courses, not because I wasn't capable, but because unnecessary policing wasted my time. How are we supposed to focus on our education when we're treated like criminals? How can we grow when we're met with suspicion instead of support?

We don't need police in our schools. We need to secure a hiring freeze on school cops, cut funding for the hundreds of vacant school cop positions, and then use the funding from both these divestments to protect and expand to achieve the actual investments in our education and our future. Investments such as restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive. These are the resources that uplift students instead of

criminalizing them. We need proper clubs and training to help advance students in aspects besides education and prepare them for the real world. We deserve an environment where we feel safe, encouraged, and empowered to succeed, and we need you in city hall to help us get there. Thank you.

BROOKLYN
301 GROVE STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11237
TEL 718 418 7690
FAX 718 418 9635

QUEENS
92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372
TEL 718 565 8500
FAX 718 565 0646

STATEN ISLAND
161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302
TEL 718 727 1222
FAX 718 981 8077

LONG ISLAND
1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE
BRENTWOOD, NY 11717
TEL 631 231 2220
FAX 631 231 2229

WESTCHESTER
46 WALLER AVENUE
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
TEL 914 948 8466
FAX 914 948 0311

Save Education Programs & Services In NYCPS

By: Sheba Simpson-Amsterdam, M.Ed.

As an advocate for education, I am here to say that we must protect and expand, not cut education services in New York City public schools.

Our students deserve fully funded schools with the resources they need to succeed, from academic support to mental health services, arts programs, and special education. Every time we cut education funding, we deny students opportunities and set them up for unnecessary struggles.

NYCPS serves over a million students, many from low-income, immigrant, and historically marginalized communities. Cutting education services means larger class sizes, fewer counselors, and less access to after-school programs, directly harming the very students who need support the most. Our children are the future of this city, and investing in their education is investing in New York itself.

We must hold our government leaders accountable and demand that they prioritize public education. The city has the resources; it's about choices. We cannot balance the budget on the backs of our children. Instead, we must ensure every student gets the high-quality education they deserve. Let's fight for our schools, our teachers, and our students, because when we save education services, we save the future of New York City.



Testimony of Soleidy Marte, 9th grade student:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Soleidy Marte, and I am a 14 year old freshman at The Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This semester, I have been participating in a Community-Based Civics project through Generation Citizen.

For this project, my class discussed various issues impacting our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After thoughtful discussion and debate, we decided to focus on improving access to mental health providers and set a goal to increase the availability of school-based mental health services so that students can receive the support they may need.

As a teenager, I have experienced how challenging it can be to balance school, family, and personal struggles. When I feel alone in these matters, I feel more distance from my goals, those aspirations that inspire me each day and instill hope for a brighter future. It's isolation and pressure to maintain social relationships, excel academically, and handle responsibilities.

During my 4th grade year, when Covid-19 struck, the impact on my mental health and educational development was profound. The sudden transition from daily in person interactions with classmates and teachers to remote learning felt isolating. The routine of school life disappeared, leading to a repetitive cycle that reduced my motivation. The effects of the period are still present, emphasizing the need for schools to prioritize more accessible mental health resources at school.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense disruption on my education, arguably unlike anything that has ever been seen before in world history. Now, we are facing a growing mental health crisis among young people because issues stemming from the pandemic have yet to be truly dealt with in our schools.

For example, many students do not have someone in their lives whom they can turn to, leaving many to feel hopeless and alone. As a result, they gravitate to isolating themselves on their cell phones. Something that for sure can help with this is more mental health providers in schools.

Therefore, I am asking the NYC City Council to not cut mental health services at school from the budget to ensure that students like me have a safe space to talk, seek help, and learn how to cope with life's challenges.

Thank You

From: [Stella Kang](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony for the March 13th, 2026 New York City Council Committee on Education
Date: Monday, March 10, 2025 2:35:25 PM



Testimony of Stella Kang
The New York City Council Committee on Education
March 13, 2025

Thank you members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify on the importance of continued investment in critical education programs in New York City.

My name is Stella Kang and I am here today to urge Mayor Adams and the City Counsel to prioritize funding for essential education programs that serve thousands of students and families across our city.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget made vital investments to sustain education programs that were at risk due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. However, several key programs have only been funded for this year, meaning they are at risk of being eliminated as soon as July 2025 unless action is taken in the FY 2026 budget.

These programs include:

- Early Childhood Education: 3-K, Preschool Special Education Classes, Extended Day Seats, and Outreach
- Summer Programming
- Learning to Work
- Community Schools
- Restorative Justice
-

Teacher Recruitment

- Mental Health COntinuum
- Immigrant Family COmmunications & Outreach
- High-Impact Tutoring
- Student Success Centers

Without dedicated funding, these programs will disappear leaving thousands of students without the resources they rely on for academic success, social-emotional support, and college and career readiness.

Without stable funding, parents will lose access to early childhood education, leaving working families struggling to find quality care for their children. Programs like High-Impact Tutoring and Student Success Centers that support struggling students will be lost, deepening the educational disparities already present in our city. Furthermore, without continued investment in Restorative Justice, Community Schools, and Mental Health Services, we risk undoing the progress made in creating safe, inclusive learning environments for all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities.

We strongly urge Mayor Adams and the City COuncil to baseline these education programs in the FY 26 Preliminary Budget to ensure that students, families, educators, and providers have long-term stability and assurance that these essential services will not disappear. We also call for additional investments in students with the greatest needs, particularly those from low-income, immigrant, and historically underserved communities. New York City cannot afford to turn its back on the future of its children. These programs are not luxuries, but they are necessities. Education is a fundamental right, and we must fight to protect it.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify. I urge you to take immediate action to secure the future of these critical education programs.

Best,
Stella Kang

Thank you chair Joseph, Chair Eric Dinowitz, and the fellow dais for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Suah Kim, and I'm a senior student looking to graduate from Stuyvesant High School. I'm also a member of the Youth Community Project Team at the Korean American Family Service Center. I'm here today to oppose the proposed budget cuts that endanger the accessible educational programs that serve students in my NYC community.

Having grown up in the NYC public education system, I can attest to how critical it is to fund educational programs that currently serve low income students, many of whom are Asian Americans. For prospective university students like myself, college readiness programs and the Student Success Centers are some of the possible resources we may rely on to seek higher education. Future students shouldn't have to sacrifice resources that help them attend prestigious universities that they otherwise wouldn't be able to. I ask the council to prioritize resources which many of your constituents rely on to pursue higher education.

Many of my mentors, and even my own district representative in Congress, have utilized CUNYS to access quality education. I know many of my peers are looking to CUNYS for the same opportunity, and mayor Adams' proposed budget cuts, including a \$114 million cut from CUNYs, may compromise education for many of them.

Education is at the forefront of society. I've been privileged to be a benefactor of NYC's public education thus far. But now is not the time to cut back at the expense of younger generations; I urge the council to restore funding in public education. Thank you.

Suhey Hernandez

Kew Gardens, NY, 11415

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As a previous first grade and second grade DOE teacher I have experienced first hand the literacy crisis our children are facing. I had to teach all of my students basic literacy skills in first grade. Skills they should have learned years before.

Now as a mom to a two year old, I along with his private daycare have been teaching my son those basic literacy skills that will prepare him for reading once he enters Kindergarten. No parent should be waitlisted for 3K have to scramble for private childcare as these are crucial years for childhood development that will set our kids up for a successful future.

Theresa Dernbach

11218

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

When I got pregnant with my second child, I was very excited but also scared - with the timing, if my son didn't get a place in free 3k, we would have to pay for 2 kids in daycare at the same time. And we wouldn't be able to afford it. My husband and I both make 6 figures and live in south Brooklyn. Luckily my son got a spot in free 3k. It appalls me that costs are so high that a high earning couple like us can't even afford 2 kids in daycare at the same time - I think about much worse is it for the majority of New Yorkers. I never want to leave this city and I don't want my fellow New Yorkers driven out of the city because they can't afford childcare. We pay \$1800 a month for a small in-home daycare.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Strengthen Food Ed in NYC - Testimony
Date: Sunday, March 16, 2025 11:10:05 AM

NYC Council Committee on Education Hearing 03/13/25

Testimony submitted by:
Vanessa Sossa Sanchez
Food Educator, Alegria Vegana LLC
[REDACTED]

Chair Joseph, members of the City Council Education Committee, Council Member Abreu and your staff, *thank you for your service.*

My name is Vanessa Sossa Sanchez and I am the Founder and Food Educator at Alegria Vegana LLC.

As the founder of Alegría Vegana, I am committed to promoting holistic wellness through plant-based education, with a focus on culturally relevant food choices. Through my work as a food educator in NYC schools, I have introduced students to hands-on cooking experiences that empower them to make healthier and more sustainable food choices. By integrating plant-based nutrition, zero-waste practices, and food literacy into the classroom, I aim to equip students with lifelong skills that support their well-being and the environment.

Collaborating with the Tisch Food Center and the Food Ed Coalition has strengthened my ability to advocate for comprehensive food education in NYC schools. Their resources, research, and policy initiatives have supported my work in ensuring that students—especially those in underserved communities—have access to quality food education. Through this partnership, I have been able to connect with fellow educators, share best practices, and amplify the importance of equitable food education policies.

We are thrilled to join the Food Ed Coalition in endorsing the following key policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the education, well-being and health of communities throughout New York City.

We urge the council to strengthen Food Ed in NYC by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing Food Ed programs & partner support.

The Food Ed Hub has been instrumental in fostering a community of educators and advocates dedicated to transforming food education in NYC. As an active participant, I have engaged in discussions, training, and advocacy efforts that align with my mission at Alegría Vegana. This collective effort has reinforced my belief that every student deserves access to food education that not only informs but also inspires healthier, more conscious choices for themselves and their communities.

- Renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub is essential to enhance collaboration among food education providers and expand access to nutrition education for New York City's vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households (\$250,000).
- Developing a strategic framework with an outside consultant will advance the coalition's growth while aligning with the goals of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to improve nutrition security in NYC Public Schools (\$100,000).
- Increasing funding for food education programs is vital, as only 190 out of approximately 1,800 NYC public schools currently receive support, and additional resources will allow more students to benefit (\$3 million).
- Establishing a Speaker's Initiative will facilitate targeted funding for 100 CBOs, enabling them to hire staff, purchase equipment, and develop culturally relevant curricula, ultimately ensuring access to high-quality nutrition education for NYC's most vulnerable students (\$2.5 million).
- Investing in a consistent evaluation methodology for CBOs can inform the community and council of the value and areas for improvement in food ed programming (\$100,000).

We also urge the council to improve NYC nutrition security by strengthening the understanding of key food initiatives and ensuring the development of inclusive and transparent standards for Food Ed.

- We amplify community voices in assessing and improving key food initiatives like Plant-Powered Fridays to foster greater food and nutrition security across NYC. This initiative will also enhance CUNY's Food Justice Leadership Fellowship by training
 - diverse undergraduate students to advocate for community-based food policies (\$499,878).

- A comprehensive review of NYC's food service workforce will evaluate career pathways, wages, and professional development opportunities (We request that the Comptroller's Office conduct this study).
- It is essential to develop culturally responsive, research-based food education standards to guide community partners and educators across NYCPS (\$1.5 million). Additionally, CBOs should be compensated for their expertise in co-creating standards, and professional development resources for teachers and schools (\$300,000).

We implore the council to expand food access and summer nutrition opportunities.

- Expanding support for Summer Rising and Summer Meal Support programs will enhance food access and education for students when school is out, ensuring they receive nutritious meals and hands-on food experiences. To maximize the program's effectiveness, it is crucial to incorporate a meal period before dismissal, particularly for those from food-insecure families who rely on summer meals as their primary source of nutrition.
- Increasing funding for free Health Bucks would further expand access to fresh food for families by simplifying the application process and allowing community-based organizations (CBOs) to partner with schools more effectively. This funding would address the high demand seen in 2024, where numerous applications for Health Bucks went unfunded, thereby ensuring local CBOs can better serve their communities.

Thank you for your time,

Vanessa Sossa Sanchez

--

Best wishes,



photo



Vanessa Sossa Sanchez

Sustainable Food Educator, Alegria Vegana LLC

www.alegriavegana.net • hello@alegriavegana.net

[Brooklyn, New York](#)



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**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed education budget. My name is Xia Chen, and I am **a parent of preschool student with disabilities attending a 4410 special education preschool in Brooklyn.**

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

As a parent of a preschool student with a disability it is crucial for my child to have teachers in our school to teach my child. My child is making progress talking and that is all thanks to our 4410 preschool special education teacher.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

- \$55 Million for preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities
- and
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ms Xia of Brooklyn, New York.

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed education budget. My name is **Xiu Yin Zhong**, and I am **a parent of preschool student with disabilities attending a 4410 special education preschool in Brooklyn**.

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

As a parent of a preschool student with a disability it is crucial for my child to have teachers in our school to teach my child. My child is making progress talking and that is all thanks to our 4410 preschool special education teacher.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

- \$55 Million for preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities
- and
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ms Xiu Yin Zhong of Brooklyn, New York.

Hello Elected Officials of the Education Committee,

My name is Yaretzi Vidals and I'm a current senior at Brooklyn Technical High School on behalf of the PACT Activist Program with The Center for Anti-Violence Education. The PACT Program which stands for Power, Action, and Change for Teens, helps empower young girls like myself to learn how to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Today, I'm writing to you to discuss the issues NYC students face with the budget cuts and the increase of policing in schools. While the case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* may have eliminated racial segregation in public schools 70 years ago, the looming threat of President Trump's policies such as the defunding of schools and dismantling of diversity programs and the lack of support Mayor Adams is showing for our city, it's important to emphasize the longevity of diversity programs such as the Discovery Program and provide funding for installing restorative justice practices to create safer environments for students.

The Discovery Program, a program that helps minority students get into specialized high schools, is an important part in allowing low-income minority students to get the same opportunities as those who may have had years of tutoring due to their financial resources. This program is important to keep in the school system to allow future generations of students, to achieve their desires to be apart of a greater community pursuing higher education that will aid them in providing to their community. The Discovery Program has been under fire for the past few years, as it has been taking away seats from those who have passed the exam and are of a wealthier background. With Trump's new policies, of eliminating affirmative action, diversity in school curriculums, and elimination of mental health in schools, diversity initiatives like the Discovery Program is facing the threat of being eliminated. Coming from a school where 60% of students are Asian, and other minorities such as Latinos and African Americans barely reach

about 10% of the student body combined, it's hard to not feel alienated or discredited for our academic achievements.

School programs such as the Discovery Program, restorative justice initiatives, and mental health resources are crucial in fostering students to grow into a community and develop the skills necessary to thrive. However, without funding for these programs, students will be stuck down the pipeline of not going to school as their teachers may not believe in mental health, or may often get themselves suspended from simply defending themselves. Both scenarios mentioned are disruptive to a student's education. With the funding provided by local and federal governments, schools can become a place that fosters care and support for students facing tough times. By failing to fund these services, elected officials are failing to provide students with an equal opportunity to succeed in their future. Instead, officials like Mayor Adams are focused on financing more units in the NYPD and sending officers to schools. While Mayor Adams and other officials may be under the impression that police officers are creating a safe learning environment, the presence of law enforcement only impedes students on focusing on their studies and leads to the criminalization of normal behavior. Minor conflicts, such as simply sitting in the halls or defending oneself against fellow students, may lead to students getting suspended or even arrested. This directly contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, where youth, a part of marginalized communities, are taken out of their studies to serve in prison or juvenile detention.

Education is not just about reading and math, but about helping students understand the real world and how they will contribute to their communities. Police officers are not needed in schools to foster a "safe environment" to learn from, this can be fostered through an increase in funding in school districts. Guidance counselors in schools, especially in BIPOC communities need to be trained, alongside teachers to adjust to the mental breaks that students may need,

which can be done with an increase of funding. The absence of restorative justice and mental health resources displays the lack of inequity within the NYC Public School system and often low-income BIPOC students face the price for the lack of funding their schools receive, no matter how bright they may be. This issue is the same in Specialized High Schools, which see a lack of qualified staff to be appointed as guidance counselors, social workers, and health teachers to teach and consult with hundreds of students. The Education Committee must ensure that every student—regardless of their background or school they may go to—has access to the necessary resources to grow as an individual and as a community member a part of their school and communities, through the increased funding and support towards restorative justice and diversity initiatives.

**Testimony for New York City Council
Committee on Education**

Re: Fiscal Year 26 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the proposed education budget. My name is Ziyang Lin, and I am a **parent of preschool student with disabilities attending a 4410 special education preschool in Brooklyn.**

We appreciate that, last year, Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs, staff, and services that had been at risk of ending due to expiring temporary federal stimulus dollars and city funds. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

As a parent of a preschool student with a disability it is crucial for my child to have teachers in our school to teach my child. My child is making progress talking and that is all thanks to our 4410 preschool special education teacher.

Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include:

- **\$55 Million for preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities**
- and
- Teacher recruitment at a time when NYC needs more teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ms Ziyang Lin of Brooklyn, New York.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paullette Healy

Address: _____

I represent: D75 Community

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: Kira Healy

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeylin Evans

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

Student
Urban Youth
Collaborative
(Student)

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: 03/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Darius Tofant

Address: Bronx NY 104

I represent: SBU & UYC

Address: _____

Urban Youth
Collaborative
Meeting

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: 03/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ava Harris

Address: _____

I represent: SBU & UYC

Address: _____

Urban Youth
Collaborative
MRY
(Student)

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: March 13th 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ethel Nunez

Address: _____

I represent: MRY

Address: _____

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

Urban
Youth
Collaborative
MRNY
Student

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 13th 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Holiday Woodside

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Urban
Youth
Collaborative
MRNY
Student

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 13th 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sebastian Espinal

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Student
Urban Youth
Collaborative

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dhalien Alban

Address: _____

I represent: Urban Youth

Address: _____



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



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anderson Goodman

Address: Queens St

I represent: MRNY & NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alvin Funderburg

Address: _____

I represent: Urban Youth Collaborative

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: Sebastian Espinal

Address: _____

I represent: Urban Youth Collaborative

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: Holiday Woodside

Address: _____

I represent: Urban Youth Collaborative

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: Becky Yang

Address: _____

I represent: Circle keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools

**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: Nicolas Lipscomb

Address: _____

I represent: Circle keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 14 March, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kazuhiko Utsunomiya

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimberly Li / Student

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andres Alonso Rodriguez / Student

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abbar Bhuiyan / Student

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emma Vadchra

Address: C.O.C

I represent: NYCPB

Address: _____

Food Ed
Hub

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tura Vanriel

Address: Tisch Food Center, Teachers College

I represent: Tisch Food Center

Address: _____

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

Leave It
Baller /
Food ED HUB

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: Briana Black

Address: 14 Metropolitan oval

I represent: Leave It Baller Foundation

Address: Tisch Center

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amyrnel Santana (student)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lora Liu

Address: V.P

I represent: SCA

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jay Findling

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: Shakil Intekhab

Address: DIIT, Chief information officer

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: Kevin Moran

Address: Chief of school operations

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: Tam Taratko

Address: CEO, Office of Space Management

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: Dan Weisberg

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: Nina Kubota

Address: President

I represent: SCA

Address: _____

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

FOOD ED

HUB

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: 13 MAR 25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters

Address: [REDACTED] NY NY 10280

I represent: Tisch Food Center Teachers College
Columbia University

Address: 525 W 120th St. NY NY 10027

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALLISON MARINO

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD NYC - FOOD/PLANT

Address: 60 AVE X - BROOKLYN, NY

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-13-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brett Saffer

Address: [REDACTED] NY NY 10163

I represent: Myself

Address: _____

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

Student

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: Logan Vanhoutte (age 8)

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: fellow students

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: Sarah Jonas

Address: same as below

I represent: Children's Aid

Address: 117 W 124th Street, New York, NY 10027

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan Nordgren

Address: [redacted] NY 10027

I represent: NY Sun Works

Address: 157 Columbus Ave NY 10023

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: Jeanine Schoen

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, 11215

I represent: PS 321 / Parent

Address: 7th Ave & 1st St Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trenton Price

Address: 475 Riverside Dr, Suite 239 New York, NY 10115

I represent: Salvadori Center

Address: " " " " " "

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DALE KELAY

Address: 46 RECTOR ST. NY NY 10006

I represent: CJA

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/12/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Self

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: Sarah Moravcsik

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: myself

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-13-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Calvin R. Kendrick

Address: [REDACTED] Bk 10456

I represent: Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Ct.

Address: [REDACTED] Bx 10456

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: Jeff Klein

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gregory Brender

Address: _____

I represent: Day Care Council of New York

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Senack

Address: _____

I represent: CIDNY

Address: 1010 Ave of the Americas

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Allison Lewis

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn 11210

I represent: New Yorkers United For Child Care

Address: 85 Broad St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emberly Olsen

Address: [REDACTED] LIC, NY 11009

I represent: NIC Aris in Ed 20und1ebl

Address: 520 8th Ave NY, NY 10018

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Derwin Greene

Address: [REDACTED] Bx, NY 10463

I represent: Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 13th, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chaplain, Sandra Mitchell

Address: [REDACTED] Street Bx NY 10415

I represent: Parent Action Committee - Dignity

Address: 1514 Townsend Ave in Sells-MCC
Bx NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hadia Ali

Address: _____

I represent: YA - YA Network &

Address: Dignity in Schools - NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Orla Flynn

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers &

Address: Dignity in Schools - NY

40th

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: Naura Ayoub

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

40th

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: Mololuwa Fasola

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools - NY

40th

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: Ibel Nunez

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network + Dignity

Address: in Schools NY

Youth

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: Janice Chang

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network + Dignity

Address: in Schools NY - DSC-NY

Youth

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: Kira Healey

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Youth

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: Aming Jallow

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA Network - Dignity

Address: in Schools NY



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



Youth

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: Emily Puenas

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools - NY

Youth

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: Sirahi Drame

Address: _____

I represent: YA - YA Network +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Youth

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: Amber Colon

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY



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



Youth

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: Ma mouns Doumbis

Address: _____

I represent: YA - YA Network +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Youth

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: Aislinn Cao

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY Desc-JJ

Youth

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: Blaise Lamisha

Address: _____

I represent: YA - YA Network +

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

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

Youth

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: Merlin Perez

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Anti violent education

Address: CVE + Dignity in Schools NY

Youth

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: Cai Lin

Address: _____

I represent: YA-YA network

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Youth

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: Edward Sanchez

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for Equitable

Address: education funding + ccc

DSCNY

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

Youth

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: Ameng Begum

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Anti Violent Educa

Address: Dignity in Schools NY

Adult

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: Chauncy Young

Address: _____

I represent: New Settlement PAC & Dignity

Address: in Schools NY DSENY

Adult

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Ortiz

Address: [Redacted] BK

I represent: Dignity in Schools - NY D.E.M.Y

Address: _____

Adult

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: Sandra Mitchell

Address: _____

I represent: New Settlement PAC & Dignity

Address: in Schools NY DSC-NY

Adult

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: Imani Wilson

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers - Dignity

Address: in Schools NY - DSC-NY

Adult

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: Martin Urbach

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers &

Address: Dignity in schools NY

Adult

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: Janina Witherspoon

Address: _____

I represent: The Circle Keepers + Dignity

Address: In Schools NY - D.C. NY

Adult

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: Rachel Natelson

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Commission on Racial Equity

Address: + Dignity in Schools NY

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Randi Levine

Address: _____

I represent: Advocates for Children of New York

Address: _____



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



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ERICA CHO

Address: _____

I represent: KAFSC

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: MUHAMMAD MUJAHID

Address: _____

I represent: KAFSC

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: JENNA KIM

Address: _____

I represent: KAFSC

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: EMILY LIN

Address: _____

I represent: KAESC

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: SUAH Kim

Address: _____

I represent: KAESC

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: JOH Kim

Address: _____

I represent: KAESC

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: SARAH KIM

Address: _____

I represent: KAFC

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: Maggie MOROFF

Address: _____

I represent: THE ARISTE Coalition

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KULSOOM TAPAL

Address: _____

I represent: CALF

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: BRANDON LEE

Address: _____

I represent: CACF

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: AYESHA TASNIM

Address: _____

I represent: CACF

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: KYAE SIN LINN LAT

Address: _____

I represent: CACF

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: WAIZA IERSHAD

Address: _____

I represent: CACF

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-13-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alberia Jerning

Address: 5030 Broadway Suite 641

I represent: LINC - City's First Readers

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: Elizabeth Vladeck

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: Aaron Sanders

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Gran 2 St. Settlement

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: DONAVAN SWANSON

Address: 209 Jerusalem St., Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Office of the Brooklyn Borough President

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Soleidy Marte - student

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Calizon - student panel

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Manca - Student

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen - student panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Rodriguez - Student

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen - student panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alix Torres - Student

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen - student panel

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: (#3) M. Djeneba Toure - Student

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen - student panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: (#2) Marty Glover - Teacher

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen - student panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: (#1) Christina Khardisari dis

Address: _____

I represent: Generation Citizen NYC Student panel

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michaela Schuchman

Address: NY

I represent: Legal Services NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Kraus

Address: _____

I represent: NY Lawyers for the Public Interest

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: Ilyssa Lapp

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liz Sheldon

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emely Pena

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Bosch

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of Greater NY

Address: 26 Bleeker St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fiadhina O'Grady

Address: _____

I represent: The Samaritans of New York

Address: Suicide PREVENTION CENTER

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3.13.2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOE TITUS

Address: _____

I represent: HIVECLASS

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: Nickesha Francis

Address: _____

I represent: Good Shepherd Services

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: Tasmin Ali

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alondra Tirso

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of Greater NY

Address: 26 Bleeker Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pariza Bhuiya

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tenzin Isopel

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maryam Mohammed-Miller

Address: _____

I represent: Planned Parenthood of GNY

Address: 26 Bleeker Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trevonda Kelly

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: March 13, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dale Kelly

Address: 40 Rector St. 12th floor NYC 10006

I represent: CSA - Executive Vice President

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: March 13, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: President Michael Mulgrew

Address: United Federation of Teachers

I represent: 52 Bway

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Cohen

Address: _____

I represent: Simon Wiesenthal Center

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Glenys Riara

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: 2nd Vice President, Local 372, XC37

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: Mia Theresa Pate

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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: Emma Vadehra C.O.P

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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: Dan Weisberg First Deputy Chancellor

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: Melissa Arles Ramos - Chancellor

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: Seritta Scott C.F.O.

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: Mark Rampersant

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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: Elizabeth Vladeck

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Thompson

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christina Melendez

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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 Dawson

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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: Christina Foti

Address: _____

I represent: NYCP3

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: Kleber Palma

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: Monique Seales

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: Danika Rux

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: Flavia Poella Perdomo

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPs

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Kraus

Address: c/o NYLPI 151 West 30th Street

I represent: New York Lawyers for the

Address: Public Interest

**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: Debra Freeman

Address: _____

I represent: Four Freedoms Democratic Club

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: Chelsea Baytemur

Address: _____

I represent: YMCA of Greater NY

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: [REDACTED] Jamaica NY 11436

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: [REDACTED]

Bklyn NY 11238
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms