

**Testimony of NYC Public Schools
on the Department of Education's Spending of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds**

November 16, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee here today. My name is Emma Vadehra; I am the Chief Operating Officer for NYC Public Schools, or the Department of Education (DOE). I am joined here today by our Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Seritta Scott, as well as many of my other colleagues from DOE who have worked on some of our key stimulus programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the spending of Federal COVID relief funds. Before I begin, I would like to express our gratitude to the City Council, as well as our State and Federal partners, for your leadership and advocacy in securing this critically important funding at a time of great need for our city and our students.

I'm excited to be here today, and to have joined the DOE team. After working on educational equity issues at the Federal level, both in the Obama administration and the Senate, I joined the DOE in July. I am a native New Yorker who is glad to be home. I now oversee our financial and operational teams at the DOE, with the same lens towards equity. Our finance team is led by our new CFO, Seritta Scott, who also just joined us, and who is another native New Yorker and lifelong public servant. She was previously at OMB for ten years, most recently leading their education work, and we are lucky to have her.

As you all well know, the pandemic had a devastating impact on the fiscal health of our City and our schools, while increasing the academic and social-emotional needs of our students. Prior to the unprecedented COVID-response investments from the City, State, and Federal governments, the City was facing a dire economic situation. New York City, like localities across the country, has been on the frontlines in combating the growing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic-induced school closures and transition to remote learning forced our students and educators to confront major mental health difficulties, higher rates of absenteeism, and concerns about increasing academic needs. The disruptions also directly impacted DOE's educational services and posed enormous fiscal and economic uncertainties that we are still confronting today.

In my testimony today, I will provide an overview of Federal relief funding, how we have been spending those resources, the current status of our budget, and the fiscal headwinds we will confront.

Federal Relief Funding Overview

The federal government provided three funding streams for elementary and secondary school relief over the course of the pandemic:

- The first one was enacted in March 2020 and expired on September 30, 2022. Called the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES, that package provided

approximately \$700 million to the DOE, but resulted in no new net funding to us because the State decreased Foundation Aid by the same \$700 million in Fiscal Year 2021 and used CARES to make up the difference.

- The second Federal funding stream was enacted in December 2020 and will expire on September 30, 2023. It was labelled the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, or CRRSA, and provided the DOE with approximately \$2 billion, of which \$1.5 billion has been spent to date.
- The last Federal relief legislation was enacted in March 2021 and will expire on September 30, 2024. Called the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA, it is providing approximately \$4.8 billion in funding, of which \$1.5 billion has already been spent.

From these latter two streams, the DOE spent approximately \$300 million in FY 2021 and \$2.7 billion in FY 2022. The current Financial Plan following yesterday's November Plan update includes \$1.8 billion in FY 2023, \$1.7 billion in FY 2024, and approximately \$250 million in FY 2025.

DOE has used this stimulus funding to invest in key programs this year, all of which were included in this year's Adopted Budget. Specifically:

- \$456 million for 3-K programming;
- \$236 million for Summer Rising programming;
- \$464 million in school budget support, including targeted allocations for students' Academic Recovery, Special Education Recovery Services, and Mental Health services;
- \$227 million in Academic Services, including Mosaic Curriculum development, Pre-K Special Education, Arts, Computer Science, and Learning to Work programming;
- \$60 million in Community Schools expansion, allowing us to support approximately 100 schools;
- \$132 million in Devices and IT Support, including LTE and help desk services for families;
- \$29 million in the expansion of Public School Athletic League programs; and
- \$132 million for additional priorities, including:
 - \$49 million for contracted school nurses to provide nursing at all DOE school buildings;
 - \$33 million to expand career pathways programming;
 - \$11 million to expand bilingual education classes and support;
 - \$11 million to expand parent engagement, translation, and interpretation services;
 - \$10 million for new digital teaching and learning experiences;
 - \$9 million for Project Pivot, supporting community-based organizations (CBOs) in providing violence interruption activities in high-need schools;
 - \$7 million to expand literacy and dyslexia programming; and
 - \$2 million to expand gifted and talented programming.

The above is a statement of values for our City's students and families, prioritizing sending hundreds of millions of dollars directly to our principals and schools, 3-K providers, and school-based programs. It invests in both our recovery and a new vision for our public schools, providing additional targeted support

services for vulnerable student populations, while transforming students' experiences and putting them on a path to long-term economic security. To give a bit more detail on some of these spending priorities:

- The Chancellor recently announced Project Pivot, which empowers and equips young people with tools to make positive choices for themselves and uplifts pro-social development pathways, working with local CBOs that have been doing great work in our communities for years.
- Literacy is a key shared priority, and thanks to this investment, New York City now has the most comprehensive approach to supporting public school students with dyslexia in the United States, including early assessment, research-based learning methods, and as needed, specialized instruction through development of special programs and academies.
- And to put more of our students on a path to career success once they finish school, this administration has expanded the Career Readiness and Modern Youth Apprenticeship (CRMYA) program, which will now connect 3,000 students across more than 50 schools with paid multi-year apprenticeships to prepare them for real world jobs.

Unfortunately, while these investments financed through relief funding are critical, we do not expect the Federal COVID support to continue. We will need to work together over the coming years to sustain and build on efforts that are so essential to our students and schools.

Across these investments, we share your commitment to ensuring that stimulus funding continues to be spent equitably, impactfully, and responsibly. Moreover, as both Seritta and I settle into our new roles, we are eager to do our work with a focus on equity and in a spirit of collaboration and transparency. Transparency – about processes and how dollars are distributed and used – is essential to ensuring the best possible decisions and adhering to good government practices. We know the importance of enabling our communities, families, and students, as well as our elected officials to have the information they need. We are eager for your feedback in this effort.

Budget Update

The majority of our budget remains spent on schools and services that take place in schools. In the Adopted Budget, just under half of the \$37.6 billion total directly supports school instruction, programming and staffing, and another 40 percent is associated with non-controllable costs such as legal mandates, debt service, fringe benefits, and pension costs. Of the remaining 13 percent, 11 percent is dedicated to operations support like facilities, transportation, food, and utility costs, and two percent of the entire budget is directed toward central administration. Our per pupil spending actually remains well-above pre-pandemic levels, growing from just under \$26,000 in FY 2019 to about \$31,000 this year. The Chancellor is laser-focused on directing as much funding to schools as possible, and in the last several months we have done just that.

Last week, we were proud to announce that we would be holding school budgets harmless for any lower than projected enrollment in this year's mid-year adjustment process. That amounts to an approximately \$200 million investment in school budgets. I thank the Council for your advocacy on this. This is the third

straight year for which stimulus dollars have been used to hold schools harmless for mid-year enrollment changes. This has been especially important as our communities recover from the pandemic—the main purpose of stimulus funding.

That funding is in addition to other increases and flexibilities to support school budgets this summer and fall. Those include almost \$12 million to support our newest students from asylum-seeking families, over \$50 million in hardship supports for schools, additional flexibility on \$100 million in existing funding that schools received in this year's budget, and recently, the guarantee that early childhood education providers who experienced lower-than-expected enrollment will be paid at least 75 percent of the value of their FY 2022 contracts. Again, we thank the Council for your leadership and look forward to working with you on our shared priorities.

Fiscal Headwinds

I noted previously that the stimulus funding is due to expire and that we do not expect the Federal government to renew those investments. In addition, as the Mayor and several independent budget monitors like the Citizen's Budget Commission have noted, the City's broader out-year revenue picture is challenging. The Mayor has asked all agencies to plan accordingly. So I want to address with full transparency some of what you have seen in the recently released November plan, including the Administration's plan to meet the Department of Education's share of the citywide Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG).

While the November Plan assumes a continued investment in 3-K at our current level of \$456 million, it no longer assumes an expansion of 3-K with stimulus funding next year compared to this year. Instead, current 3-K funding levels will remain steady. That amounts to a savings of about \$284 million in stimulus funding in each of FY 2024 and FY 2025, which has been reallocated to baseline needs in our budget. That allows us to meet a large portion of the PEG without cuts to existing programs and services.

The November Plan also reflects savings from lower-than-expected spending this year associated with the return of unvaccinated staff and slower hiring of central staff and school safety agents. I want to emphasize that no reductions to Fair Student Funding, or additional cuts to existing programs or services, are included in the November Plan.

In addition to these economic headwinds, the reality remains that we are facing an impending fiscal cliff when stimulus funding runs out in 2024 and 2025. The FY 2024 budget currently includes almost \$100 million in 3-K services with no funding source in the baseline budget, as well as approximately \$80 million supporting social workers and mental health professionals, \$60 million for community schools, and tens of millions for other priorities such as PSAL, Arts, Computer Science, Learn to Work, and more. On net, we estimate there is over \$700 million in activities in FY 2024 that do not have a funding source once stimulus expires.

There also remain serious ongoing annual operational budget deficits in our budget areas like Carter cases, facilities, and transportation. These areas are structural deficits in our budget driven by cost growth over

and above inflation, and they will need to be addressed in a fiscally responsible way for this year and the years ahead in the Financial Plan.

While the DOE has met savings targets to date, we have a lot of hard choices in front of us as the stimulus funding expires, and we look forward to working with you in making these decisions. Your partnership and our collective advocacy to State and federal leaders are crucial to ensuring that we are providing our students with the resources they need during this recovery period and the years ahead.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today and we look forward to answering any questions that you have.



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Testimony of Sarita Subramanian
Assistant Director, New York City Independent Budget Office
To the New York City Council Committee on Education
Regarding Oversight of NYC Department of Education's Spending of Federal Covid-19 Relief Funds
November 16, 2022

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Sarita Subramanian and I am the assistant director for education at the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this oversight hearing on the Department of Education's (DOE's) spending of federal Covid relief funds. In my testimony today, I will provide an update on how much federal Covid aid the DOE has spent in 2021 and 2022 (unless otherwise specified all years are city fiscal years) and what funds remain for 2023 through 2025. I will also provide details on IBO's estimate of how much funding the city may require to continue programs that have been paid for with Covid relief that are expected to remain past the expiration of the funds. Lastly, I will discuss the need for increased transparency around the budgeting of the federal Covid aid.

Total federal Covid relief currently allocated to DOE is almost \$7.7 billion. The majority—almost \$7 billion—is aid that is restricted specifically for educational uses from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA, \$2.1 billion) and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, \$4.8 billion). In addition, the city has allocated \$607 million to the DOE from its \$5.9 billion in unrestricted State and Local Fiscal Relief Funds also from ARPA (ARPA-SLFRF). Finally, ARPA also authorized spending to enhance remote learning technology through the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), for which DOE received \$125 million in 2022.

Spending in 2021 and 2022. A total of \$3.5 billion was spent on education across all sources of federal relief in 2021 and 2022, as reported in IBO's [Federal Covid Relief Spending Dashboard](#). The DOE spent about \$2.9 billion from restricted education aid sources (85 percent of funds spent), \$400 million in ARPA-SLFRF, and \$125 million in ECF funding. Overall, the city has spent 68 percent of its total CRRSAA allocation in 2021 and 2022, which under federal rules must be used by September 2023 and about 31 percent of its total ARPA education funds, which are available for an additional year (through September 2024).

The largest programmatic use of the federal education aid—\$724 million—has been to cover the entire budget for NYC School Support Services, the nonprofit that manages the hiring of custodial support staff in schools and the purchase of cleaning supplies. Another \$388 million has been used to fund the expansion of the city's 3-K program to all 32 school districts across the city (although not yet with universal access). The city has also spent \$1.1 billion in two large budget codes "ARPA for schools" or

“CRRSAA for schools.” This spending covers many different programs, but because all of the spending comes out of these broad codes there is currently no way to identify which programs are funded, an issue I will address in a moment.

Notably, ARPA specifies that at least 20 percent of restricted education funds (a total of \$960 million) must be spent to “address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions” such as after-school or summer programming. ARPA’s learning loss spending requirement also directs districts to ensure that these interventions serve students’ academic, social, and emotional needs, and address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on student subgroups, such as students experiencing homelessness. Through the end of fiscal year 2022, \$526 million has been identified as spending for learning loss, including funds to pay for: academic recovery, additional school-based social workers and other mental health staff, Summer Rising (the city’s summer school program), special education services, and early literacy support.

Plans for Federal Covid Aid for 2023 through 2025. As IBO testified last week, as of the end of fiscal year 2022, DOE had claimed \$2.9 billion of its \$6.9 billion allocation from education-restricted funding sources. Of the unspent funds restricted for education use, \$3.7 billion has been budgeted for 2023 through 2025, as of the 2023 Adopted Budget, leaving about \$280 million in unbudgeted funds that must be used by DOE. The city released the November update of its financial plan yesterday afternoon, however this testimony does not yet reflect those revisions as details of the update are not yet available. As of this week, \$1.6 billion has already been spent in 2023.

Federal Covid Aid to Support School Budgets. The DOE has allocated over \$800 million in federal Covid aid from 2021 through 2024 to restore planned reductions in school budgets, to fully fund schools based on the city’s Fair Student Funding allocations—which distributes funds to schools based on individual student characteristics—and to maintain school budgets despite enrollment declines. The latter accounts for \$400 million, \$200 million of which was just announced last week for this school year. Please note that the \$200 million reallocation has not yet been reflected in the November Plan.

Additional Funds in 2026 and Beyond. As of the adopted budget, IBO estimated \$1.1 billion could be required in 2026 and each year thereafter to fund programs that are intended to continue past the expiration of relief funds. Of the \$1.1 billion, \$393 million was projected for the continued 3-K expansion to universal access. The Adams administration has indicated it may not continue this expansion and has reduced the 3-K budget in its recently released November Plan. We do not yet have the full plan details to determine how the federal relief was impacted. Excluding 3-K, based on prior plans about \$800 million would be required annually for Summer Rising, expanding preschool special education programs, providing additional social workers and other mental health staff, expanding career pathways and opportunities for apprenticeships for high schoolers, and maintaining community schools, among many other programs.

Need for Increased Transparency. I would like to end with a recommendation for increased transparency around the budgeting and spending of these federal stimulus funds, specifically for DOE to

use discrete budget codes for more (if not all) of the initiatives funded through these federal relief programs. Having dedicated stimulus budget codes has been helpful to closely track the Covid aid. Several initiatives already have their own budget codes, making it easy to analyze spending. For example, 3-K expansion, special education pre-K funding, funding for District 75 programs (the citywide administrative district for schools only serving students with disabilities), and NYC School Support Services all have their own dedicated budget codes, often one per revenue source (ARPA vs. CRRSAA). However, other budget codes contain many initiatives under generic titles that make tracking programmatic spending impossible. Including actual expenditures for 2021 and 2022 and budgeted amounts for 2023 through 2025, \$2.4 billion has been allocated for either “ARPA for Schools” or “CRRSAA for Schools.” This is a large amount—about 34 percent of total education federal Covid relief aid—and lacking a breakdown of those funds within the contours of the city budget makes it impossible to track what initiatives receive funding.

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



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
NOVEMBER 16, 2022**

Good afternoon,

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

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, over the past two and a half years, the students of New York City have experienced an unprecedented interruption in their education. In addition to having to adjust to learning remotely, which was impossible for some students who did not have access to the internet or electronic devices, young people experienced isolation, fear, and trauma. For students in low-income communities and communities of more color that were hardest hit by COVID, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing, the impacts of the pandemic on their education and well-being was especially acute.

That is why I am grateful that the New York City Department of Education received over \$7 billion in federal relief funding to address harms our children experienced. The DOE has an opportunity to fulfill many initiatives to which it has previously committed, including compensatory services for students with disabilities; hiring shelter-based community coordinators for students in temporary housing; expanding early childhood education, particularly for preschoolers with disabilities; and providing mental health screenings and services for students. I fully support these goals, but I am concerned about the rate at which the DOE is spending the funding, which must be spent by certain deadlines or it will expire.

For example, the city committed to hiring 100 shelter-based community coordinators for students living in temporary housing—75 hired using American Rescue Plan funding and an additional 25 through City Tax Levy. Thus far, the DOE has only hired 18 of these coordinators with the clock ticking on its allocated funding. During remote learning, students in temporary housing had the lowest attendance rate of any demographic group, and it is critical that the city prioritize hiring these staff. The DOE has not shared how or when it plans to hire the remaining 82 coordinators.

There is little transparency on how much of the relief funds the DOE has spent so far on each allocated category outlined in the FY22 budget. The DOE should provide the City Council, the NYC Comptroller, and the public with more information about what it has spent so far, and its timeline for spending its remaining funding to ensure that none of the relief funds are wasted.

I look forward to working with the City Council and the DOE to ensure that we are prioritizing the federal funding to create equitable, supportive, healing-centered schools.

Thank you.



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

**Re: NYC Department of Education's Spending of
Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds**

November 16, 2022

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the New York City Department of Education's COVID-19 relief spending. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds.

Over the course of the pandemic, Advocates for Children heard from hundreds of New York City families whose students were not getting the educational support they needed. We heard from families whose children had to wait months for an iPad, who did not have sufficient connectivity for their iPads to work or didn't have a quiet space for remote learning, whose assignments were provided only in English, or whose special education services simply didn't translate over a screen. These groups of students were often overlooked and underserved before the pandemic – and the inequities have only grown worse.

Following this unprecedented disruption in public education, we are grateful that the DOE received more than \$7 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding. Every dollar is needed, and it's important to ensure every dollar is spent wisely.

While the DOE is investing in some very important initiatives, we are worried about delays in spending. The clock is ticking with limited time for the DOE to use this funding and with students waiting for the support they need. To give just a few examples:

- We are very pleased that the DOE committed to using part of its American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth funding to hire 75 shelter-based community coordinators, and the City Council worked to negotiate city funding for an additional 25 coordinators, to work on the ground in shelters to help students get to school every day and get needed educational support. However, two months into the



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school year and with an influx of students entering shelters, only 18 of the 100 coordinators have been hired and started working.

- We are pleased that the DOE committed to using American Rescue Plan funding to launch several preschool special education initiatives. However, the DOE has hired only four preschool inclusion specialists for the entire City instead of the 38 originally announced. Furthermore, the DOE committed to a preschool special education enhancement contract with the goals of helping preschool special education programs run by community-based organizations recruit and retain teachers and add 800 seats to address the shortage of preschool special education classes that has led to children with autism and other significant disabilities sitting at home in violation of their legal rights. While 130 sites applied for the contract enhancement last year with an anticipated start date of July 2022, no contracts have yet been signed.
- The DOE has a legal obligation to provide students with disabilities with compensatory services to make up for what they missed and address their lack of meaningful progress during COVID-19. However, last year, as publicly reported, a maximum of only 40% of school-aged students with IEPs at district schools received any special education recovery services, and many students who ultimately received services went most of the year without them or received only limited services. While the DOE allocated \$157 million to schools last year to provide recovery services, the DOE allocated only \$12 million to schools this year to provide compensatory services – and the funding was not allocated until late October. We are very concerned that students have not been receiving the make-up services they need, that there has not yet been direct communication to families about the availability of these services, and that there is no plan for transportation for services taking place outside the regular school day.
- We are concerned that the \$18M of COVID-19 relief funding used by the DOE for screenings from the “mental health” allocation was not used to provide direct mental health services and supports to students. We have a youth mental health crisis demanding effective behavioral and mental health services and support for students, particularly students in high-need communities. However, in FY 22, the DOE allocated \$18 million over three years for DESSA, a tool for school staff to assess students’ social-emotional competencies and not screen for mental health needs or refer for or provide mental health services or supports. Going forward, it is critical that the City, DOE, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and NYC Health + Hospitals allocate sufficient funding for effective behavioral



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and mental health services and supports for students in high-need schools – as ample research shows that children are most likely to access mental health services in school.

We also think it is important for the DOE to provide the City Council and the public with more information about how much money the DOE actually spent in each category of COVID-19 relief funding allocated in FY 22, including funding allocated to special education, preschool special education, mental health, and restorative justice, and want to ensure that unspent funding allocated in FY 22 goes to the purposes for which it was originally intended this year and next year.

Finally, it is critical to focus on the sustainability of the important initiatives and supports that are being launched by the DOE that will continue to be needed when the COVID-19 relief funding expires. The DOE is investing COVID-19 relief funding in the expansion of 3-K; hundreds of social workers, psychologists, and nurses; restorative practices; support for students who are homeless; preschool special education programs and supports; the expansion of community schools; literacy initiatives; bilingual programs; career pathways programming; and other initiatives that will be needed in the long term. It is important for city, state, and federal elected leaders to begin figuring out a plan now to sustain long-overdue initiatives that are critical to meeting the needs of students.

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



I am Smitha Varghese with the Alliance for Quality Education.

This council unfortunately is working under an administration who is clearly striving for austerity for our education system. After cutting schools by at least \$469 million in the summer, this administration is pursuing even more cuts through his Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) which will cut access to early education services and 3K in the following years, backtracking this city's promise of universal 3K to all New York families.

The NYC DOE cannot affordable eliminate vacancies. Without full staffing the agency will continue to fall short of meeting expectations to students, families and vendor. NYC is currently behind in millions of dollars worth of payments to child care providers, even forcing some facilities to close down. For months, [child care providers have complained that the city was compounding the pandemic's strain on the industry](#) by not paying them on time or at all for publicly funded prekindergarten and 3-K programs. Although last week the city responded by pledging to deploy a rapid response team to child care centers– at this time, how could this administration justify further cutting the DOE which is in charge of administering these payments and services?

Cutting resources to The Office of Equity and Access as well as the Office of Multilingual Learners within the DOE, will impact our schools and our commitment to racial equity. Slashing these funds will hurt the delivery of services to Black, Brown and multilingual students, as cited by our partners at the New York Immigration Coalition.

We need the council to push back against this austerity and point to the \$4 billion of unspent stimulus funds meant to go towards alleviating, not starving, our education system. I want to remind the education committee that cuts and fiscal austerity is not necessary– it is a choice. As the Comptroller mentioned in his earlier testimony, the City still has \$310 million in unspent funds from FY22 which can and should be rolled over for this purpose.

Budgets are moral documents. The council must continue fighting for strategic investments in childcare and K-12 education. Schools are still recovering from impacts of the COVID pandemic; students still need academic and social emotional support. We need the City Council to be fighting to keep the DOE whole and keep the promise of universal 3K.



Testimony of Lena Bilik, Senior Policy Analyst, Children's Aid

Submitted Testimony – City Council Education Committee Hearing 11/16/22

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Rita Joseph and the members of the Education committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the city's spending of American Rescue Plan (ARP) federal stimulus dollars. Thank you to the New York City Council for your leadership on issues that impact the youth and families of NYC.

With a mission to help children living in poverty to succeed and thrive, Children's Aid provides comprehensive support to children, youth, and their families in some of the most under-resourced neighborhoods in New York City. Since our founding in 1853, Children's Aid has been anchored in the knowledge that poverty cannot be overcome with a single service delivered at a single point in time. We are a solutions-driven, multi-service agency employing a holistic strategy that serves children and their families at every stage of development, from cradle through college and career; and in every key setting — home, school, and community. Today our 2,000 full- and part-time staff members empower 50,000 children, youth, and their families through our network of 40 locations, including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers, and community health clinics. We work primarily in Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, the north shore of Staten Island, Bedford Stuyvesant/Williamsburg, and downtown Brooklyn. 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, and the New York City Coalition for Community Schools Excellence, and as a member of these networks and alliances we are in support of 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 25 years, Children's Aid has operated community schools in partnership with the New York City Department of Education. 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 needed than ever right now. 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 CBO-partner model, where nonprofits like Children's Aid partner with schools and work closely with their school partners and educators 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, mental health, dental, and vision), and family engagement strategies into the school building.

Currently, 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 needs assessments and supports 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 during extended learning time.

The impact of the last few years continues to have a profound impact on the families in our community schools, which are located in some of the neighborhoods in New York City hit hardest by the pandemic and its associated economic downturn. As community schools, we were equipped to quickly respond to the various needs that have emerged over the last few years. For example, food insecurity consistently emerged as one of the most pressing issues affecting families. To address this, community school staff partnered with Children's Aid's Go!Healthy program to mount multiple food access initiatives which distributed thousands of meals and grocery boxes throughout the last year. We also continued to stock food pantries at multiple community school sites, while also opening a new food pantry in one of our South Bronx community schools. We have also ramped up services geared toward parents and families, including virtual workshops on government benefits, workforce development, mental health and social emotional skills, and employment assistance. And the mental health and social emotional support we have always provided at our schools has been more important than ever.

Children's Aid as a community school partner has been able to provide invaluable support to our schools with these responsive, holistic services. This was also the case in community schools all over New York City. In this critical period for young people and communities, the community schools strategy is well equipped to empower schools to create and offer a network of resources that youth and families can turn to. The community schools strategy is designed to help address a multitude of the challenges facing students right now – it is not *only* a mental health strategy, an academic strategy, or an equity strategy for education – it is all of those



things and more, providing much needed coordinated, holistic support on everything from food insecurity to interrupted learning to the grief that comes with losing a loved one.

NYC and Community Schools

NYC has the largest portfolio of community schools in the country and is a leading national model. As the community schools strategy gains more and more national attention, with the Biden administration expanding the grant funding for community schools and states like California and Vermont making historic investments in the strategy, New York City has an opportunity and responsibility to continue to lead in this space by protecting community schools funding.

We truly believe that the community schools strategy is the path forward to ensure students are not left behind by this crisis. The [mental health needs of young people](#) are incredibly high, and so are the [academic needs](#). Community schools crucially address both of those needs and more through the whole child approach. But we have long believed that every school should be a community school, even before the pandemic. Students learn better when their various physical and socio-emotional needs are met and when they have significant relationships with caring adults. Community schools address barriers to learning and represent a long-term resource coordination strategy to sustainably invest in youth, families, and communities. The community schools strategy is the community-focused, efficient, student-driven, trauma-informed approach to schooling that the city's students need now.

Community schools are evidence-backed, and a good return on investment:

- A groundbreaking [RAND report](#) published in 2020 shows that the community school model is working in New York City. Among other positive findings, New York City's community schools were found to have:
 - A positive impact on student attendance in all school levels
 - A reduction in disciplinary incidents for elementary and middle school students
 - A positive impact on math achievement and credit accumulation in the third and final year
 - Improvement in school climate for elementary and middle schools.
- Community schools represent a long-term resource coordination strategy to sustainably invest in youth, families, and communities. Furthermore, research shows that community schools are a smart investment in the coordination of resources at both the school and system levels:
 - One study found a return on investment(ROI) of [over \\$7 for every \\$1 invested](#) in a community school director's salary.



- In NYC, UFT's United Community Schools data showed that a \$100,000 investment to hire a community school director can bring in more than \$600,000 in services and grants to the school community.
- The Rome Connected Community Schools program in upstate NY [reported an ROI](#) upward of \$20 for every \$1 invested in community school initiatives.

Recommendations re: ARP funding:

The City is in the process of expanding the community schools initiative from 267 to 416 schools using American Rescue Plan (ARP) federal stimulus dollars. Still, NYC has yet to develop a permanent long term sustainable funding solution for our community schools, and while federal stimulus dollars will sustain them for now until decreasing in FY25 and then dropping off completely in FY26 (ARP funding must be spent by the end of FY25), the future of these neighborhood lifelines remains unclear. Children's Aid, as a member of the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence, recommends alongside other partners 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 are critical to building community trust and authentic school-community partnerships.

The following are recommendations for ARP funding in the areas of community schools and other funding streams for youth and families:

- The City's Community Schools funding should be baselined, and in order to do so, the City must utilize a sustainable funding source to secure the longevity of the community school initiative. To fill in the gaps left by temporary American Rescue Plan dollars:
 - A total investment of \$60.3M will be needed to baseline funding for community schools after ARP funding drops off at the end of FY25.¹
 - The funding gap left by federal aid in FY26 includes the following:
 - Community Schools Expansion: \$51.2M
 - Restoration of Community Schools Contracts: \$6M
 - Community Schools Sustainability: \$3.1M
 - Additionally, in FY25, Community Schools will face a \$25.6M deficit that will need to be filled, as the community school expansion is only half-funded for that fiscal year.
 - The Department of Education's unique procurement process must continue to be examined and reformed to address the lengthy contract registration process, delays in

¹ This is based on the FY2021's Adopted Budget's plans for community schools funding.



payment and inconvenient bridge loan process. These are barriers to consistently delivering services. We are working in partnership with the DOE to make changes here.

- We also encourage the Council to ensure transparency and sustainability in all ARP education dollars spending. There are other important programs for youth and families that have been filled in with ARP dollars, including PreK, Summer Rising, and Learning to Work. Transparency around what has been spent and what is allocated will be crucial for us to know where we need to advocate to ensure young people and families don't see disruptions in critical services. The youth and families that depend on the resources of their community schools and other programs utilizing ARP dollars deserve ongoing support.

As an agency committed to eradicating poverty in the neighborhoods that we serve, we will do all that we can to advocate, protect, and increase funding for the most under-resourced youth and families in NYC. We understand the challenges the City faces to meet the needs of the city's young people, especially given the immense challenges that have been exacerbated through the crisis of the last few years. Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for their support of children, youth, families, and communities in New York City, and we look forward to continuing to partner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this very important issue. Please feel free to contact me at lbilik@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



NYC Council Committee on Education

Oversight – NYC Department of Education’s Spending of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds
October 19, 2022

Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Thank you to Chair Joseph and the Committee on Education for the opportunity to offer testimony. My name is Danielle Demeuse and I am the Director of Policy for the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF. CHCF is a non-profit organization with a 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, and as such we deliver holistically responsive services within the school and wider communities we serve.

CHCF continues to support New York City’s early care and education sector through our state contracted work as part of the NYC Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Consortium. Through our work as a CCR&R, CHCF serves providers across all five boroughs, predominantly (but not exclusively) delivering supports to child care providers in residential settings (Group Family and Family Day Care), both DOE-affiliated providers and those who remain independent and serving NYC’s children and families. The providers we work with are overwhelmingly women of color, most of whom speak Spanish as their primary language. Our bi-lingual provider supports span from: technical assistance with licensing and compliance (navigating DOHMH, OCFS and DOE), intensive coaching around mental health, medication administration training, healthy development, and literacy for infants and toddlers; as well as sustainable business model development and training.

Through our CCR&R work, we also support families in accessing child care that is responsive to their family’s culture, language, schedule and particular child needs; and further support navigation of often complex bureaucratic systems to access affordable care. Parents/guardians can be connected to CHCF or any of the CCR&Rs through 311 if they are looking for care, birth through school age, and if they need support in determining potential eligibility for subsidy/vouchers and in navigating city agency systems.

CHCF also holds a DOE affiliated Family Child Care Network in the Bronx, currently with 37 affiliated providers, serving extended day infant and toddler seats, extended day 3K, and school day/year 3K seats. Our focus is on uplifting high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining early care programs, offering our affiliated providers linguistically accessible professional development, and educational, mental health, and health and safety support to ensure delivery of quality, responsive care to the families and children in their programs. Our FCC Network team additionally supports families in navigating eligibility and access to DOE care options.





Through our school-aged youth development programs, in a typical school year, we provide after school programming at three different schools in the Bronx, with a capacity to reach 550 students, and by extension their families. Additionally, during the summers of 2021 and 2022, we extended our services at one of our partner schools to offer Summer Rising programming in partnership with the DOE. Our Community Empowerment and Youth Development teams work together throughout the year on community events that offer regular communication and discussion with families, youth, and our school and community leaders about the issues and needs facing our community. We continue to be acutely aware of the ongoing and rising concerns on families' minds pertaining to their children's well-being and education, their families' financial, housing and food security, and so much more. Especially given the arrival of newcomer asylum seekers in our community, we understand the overwhelming needs that remain and continue to grow, the exacerbated inequities that our communities continue to face, and the dire need for the city to meet its promises in supporting our children, families, and communities.

The back and forth from this administration about education system budget cuts has held so many in a state of uncertainty about the city's commitment to meet our schools' and children's needs. We all know that we are still recovering emotionally and physically, we continue to face COVID variants that are not held off by vaccination; and with the recently released National Assessment of Educational Progress scores and the New York State 3-8 ELA and math scores, we *know* that our children are still in need of equitable, targeted, and evidence-based supports to recover academically following over two years of disruption to their learning. State testing results for NYC students found that less than half of students in grades 3 through 8 were proficient in ELA and math, with a drop in overall proficiency in math by 8%, and a more significant drop in grades 6 through 8. While overall there appeared to be growth in ELA proficiency, grade level data showed less proficiency in ELA for grades 3 through 5, which is especially alarming as grade 3 reading proficiency continues to be an important indicator of long-term academic and career success.

Of further concern are the persistent and growing proficiency gaps among historically underserved student groups – students from low-income backgrounds, Black students, Latinx students, Students with Disabilities and Multilingual Learners.¹ The takeaway: regardless of enrollment drops, which are not the fault of the children still served in schools that may be facing declining enrollment, our schools and students still require and are entitled to stable, targeted funding and resources for their academic recovery. In light of the fact that this administration has not been transparent about its specific uses of federal relief funding towards student academic recovery, particularly for those targeted populations who continue to face gross inequities, and that the City Comptroller's office has demonstrated the amounts of unspent federal dollars and available unspent roll over funds from previous fiscal years², it is alarming that we are even discussing further cuts to the education budget.

¹ Pandemic Proficiency: Analysis of 2022 assessment data underscores the need to urgently address the impact of interrupted instruction (2022). The New York Equity Coalition. Retrieved on November 18, 2022 from <https://equityinedny.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/11/Assessments-Report-November-2022.pdf>

² Testimony by Senior Policy Analyst & Strategic Organizer Lara Lai to the New York City Council Committee on Federal Education (2022). Office of New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. Retrieved on November 18, 2022 from:





We urge the City Council to continue pushing for detailed transparency over the previous use of federal relief funds through FY 22, as well as for the intended uses towards evidence-based supports for our students going forward through FY 25 when all funds sunset. What little we have seen in the form of analysis of federal funding use to date raises alarm about the City's investments in academic recovery compared to other large districts in the state and nation. A report released by the State Comptroller's office underscored a 2022 study showing substantial correlation between remote instruction and widening race- and poverty-based achievement gaps, which suggests that high-poverty districts would need to dedicate more of their federal aid to academic recovery in order to help students recover from learning loss as a result of the pandemic and remote learning. The federal government required a minimum of 20% on academic recovery; NYC's initial plan allocated just over 16.5% and its FY 23 budget met the threshold by repurposing funds to support Summer Rising. NYC ultimately allocated just over 30% on evidence-based strategies to address students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs; compared to Buffalo which allocated 40%, Rochester which allocated 44%, and Yonkers and Syracuse which both allocated more than 60%.³

What we know is that NYC spent a large portion of their federal funds on restoring funding for prior programs, which causes threatening fiscal cliffs in FY 24 and 25 for programs that have had long-standing commitments made to them by city leaders and which have demonstrated impact on student learning and success, such as Community Schools, which were further expanded with these one-time dollars; and on the expansion of Universal 3K. While the previous administration's use of one-time dollars to expand programs that need to grow to meet community need long-term was extraordinarily problematic, these programs deserve expansion and city investment of their own right, as they are certainly evidence-based means of not only ensuring student recovery, but long-term academic and life success. We need this administration and council to remain committed to the promised city commitments and investments to these indispensable programs.

We join our partners in the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence in the belief that the community school strategy is the path forward to ensure students are not left behind - by the COVID crisis or by the pervasive inequities that have long plagued our systems. We join the belief that every school should be a community school, knowing that students learn better when their holistic needs are met and when they have authentic, caring relationships with adults in learning spaces. Community schools address barriers that threaten a child's holistic well-being and ability to fully engage in their education by partnering with community-based organizations in innovative ways to coordinate resources to sustainably invest in youth, families, and communities.

It is essential to successful programming to allow for relationships between CBOs and schools to have a sense of continuity as partnerships are established. No school, no matter how high performing, can be expected to continue to serve communities successfully if fundamental pieces of their ecosystem are

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/testimony-by-senior-policy-analyst-strategic-organizer-lara-lai-to-the-new-york-city-council-committee-on-federal-education-spending/>

³ A Comparative Assessment of New York City's Federal Pandemic Education Aid (2022). Office of the New York State Comptroller. Retrieved on November 18, 2022 from:

<https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-12-2023.pdf>





disrupted. Community Schools need time to flourish and are currently not set up for long-term success as it is unclear what the funding streams will be once federal relief funding ends with FY25, leaving a \$60.3M funding gap for community schools. It is critical that our champions in City Council continue to keep a watchful eye on funding commitments to the 416 schools citywide, ensuring continuity of resources for these critical programs, in upcoming budgets and budget modifications. We appreciate the work thus far by Chair Joseph and the Committee in looking ahead to the fiscal cliffs and considering how we might be able to proactively address them in the coming fiscal years.

With the Adams' Administration's recent step back from the commitment to expand Universal 3K, we join the many early childhood education advocates and champions on the Council in pushing back on the argument that there is under enrollment and therefore a misalignment with the seats that have been created thus far and the actual need city wide. As previously stated, we work closely with families in need of early care and education, both as a Family Child Care Network in partnership with the DOE and as a Child Care Resource and Referral agency that manages family access to care options, and we know that care needs are nowhere near being met citywide. We obviously support long term efforts to expand beyond 3K and 4K to universal child care access citywide, but in the meantime wholeheartedly urge the city to maintain its commitment to expanding and ensuring equitable access to 3K seats that meet family need and choice in care.

In our network capacity, we continue to see 100% enrollment and waitlists for extended day/year seats and under-enrollment in our school day/year 3K seats. There are a number of factors that must be acknowledged in why high-quality programs are under-enrolled for 3K slots:

1. Citywide enrollment is centralized, falling outside of the control of contracted community partners. This means that we can do our due diligence on marketing and outreach to the community, but families are ultimately routed to DOE for enrollment and may be directed to other programs at DOE schools or contracted centers who are competing for the same kids;
2. With staffing turnover in DOE outreach and enrollment positions, we are concerned whether staff are effectively trained up to discuss available options that would best meet the family's preferences and needs and connecting them accordingly; and
3. There continue to be concerns about the effectiveness of city outreach to families in equitable ways, particularly for historically underserved communities and communities who are hesitant to engage in government programming. A focus group led by Raising NY last fall with Bronx parents (in community districts that were flagged by this administration as high needs), we heard from a number of parents that while they know of available child care and early learning options through the city, they often don't pursue them because of the typically invasive, punitive, and at times unresponsive bureaucratic systems; and when they do reach out for the service, often what is offered does not meet their needs so they are unable to enroll their children.⁴ This is what we continue to hear through CHCF: that families would love to enroll

⁴ Scrambling, Unsatisfied, and Unsupported: Parents in the South Bronx face numerous challenges to accessing high-quality child care (2021). Raising New York. Retrieved on November 18, 2022 from:

<https://raisingnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/RNY-South-Bronx-Child-Care.pdf>





their children in 3K, but school day/year seats do not meet the care needs of a 3-year-olds. Families need care all day, all year, and therefore pass on enrolling in DOE 3K slots.

This tells us that it isn't about a lack of need or interest, it is a matter of offering services that are ill-matched to the realities of families with small children and the care that is necessary to complement 3K school day/year programming. Until the city does its due diligence in outreach and engagement with families to connect them to care and truly hear what their needs are in the event that they are not enrolling their children in 3K school day/year slots, it is inappropriate for the city to assume that under-enrollment is due to a lack of demand in certain districts and move to cut funding. We join our citywide partners in calling on the city to maintain its commitment to expanding universal 3K, to integrate a community-based enrollment component to ensure equitable enrollment in contracted programs, to adjust seats to better meet the needs of families on the path towards universal early care and learning, and to prioritize long-term sustainable citywide investments to pick up where the federal relief dollars leave off.

We thank the Chair and all of the champions in City Council for your partnership in fighting for NYC's children and families. Thank you for the opportunity to present a testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to: ddemeuse@chcfinc.org or 212-206-1090 ext. 359.



City Council Testimony

NYC DOE's Spending of Federal Covid-19 Relief Funds

November 16, 2022

<https://council.nyc.gov/testify/>

Dear City Council Education Committee Chair Rita Joseph and City Council Members,

Thank you so much for holding today's hearing on the spending of Federal Covid-19 relief funds. My name is Antonia Ferraro Martinelli and I am a member of the Community Education Council of District 15. I am here to urge City Council Members and the NYC DOE to formally request an extension of the deadline to utilize Federal Covid-19 Relief Funds. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) funds expire in September of 2023 and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds expire in September of 2024. The NYC DOE has \$5 billion in unused relief funds. Covid is not over. New immune-evasive variants are becoming dominant just in time for holiday gatherings. In fact, as I write this my own child has missed a week of school due to Covid. An extension of federal funds is necessary to address the lingering impacts of Covid. In this testimony, I will detail a few areas where federal funds could be targeted to make the most educational impact in the communities I represent.

I last submitted testimony on the education budget in June, when severe school budget cuts were approved by City Council at a time when students needed more individualized support to make up for two years of lost instruction. At that time principals in my district faced cuts to their budget in the millions that resulted in lost paraprofessionals, reduced after school and before school programs, limited programs to support Multilingual learners, lost enrichment, lost guidance counselors, lost funding for school supplies, class trips, professional development, substitute teachers and cuts to school aid hours. Teachers had been excessed at many schools leading to consolidation of classrooms and larger class sizes.

While some of our schools were able to appeal, showing that enrollment projections were flawed, the actual enrollment numbers did little to help. The staff had already been let go and the damage was done. I take the chancellor's announcement that schools will not face further mid-year adjustments, as an acknowledgement that damage was done, but I have doubts that \$200 million is sufficient to address the on-going fall-out from the pandemic.

One way an extension of Covid relief funds could ameliorate the impact of Covid is through after school programs. After school programs support students academically, socially, emotionally, and support their families financially. I liaise with PS 94 in Sunset Park, a school in a large immigrant community. Prior to the pandemic, the school was able to provide after school to all of its students, but now only 320 out of 969 students will benefit. They used to provide 22 different after school programs, which have been reduced to 5. This is $\frac{1}{4}$ of what they used to provide. Other schools are expecting parent-led volunteer bodies to pick up the slack, by fundraising and managing private after school programs. This effort is usually spearheaded by working mothers, and frankly, after two years of remote and hybrid learning, they are drained. Between 2020 and 22, 1.1 million women left the US labor force, accounting for 63 percent of all jobs lost.¹ There are still 808,000 fewer women working than in February 2020.² Federal relief funds must be extended to support elementary after school programs, so that mothers can get back to work.

Other schools in my district need extended funding to support students in temporary housing and the unanticipated influx of migrant students. PS 124 in Park Slope is struggling to serve both of these populations. 55% of the school's students now reside in temporary housing in the nearby Win shelters, of which at least 60 families are newly arrived migrants, many from Venezuela. There is a tremendous need for Spanish speaking staff, social workers, teacher's aids, and paraprofessionals. A typical caseload for a social worker might be 20 students, but at PS 124 a social worker can expect a caseload of 130 students. Parents run a Mutual Aid society in addition to the PTA to support families in need. I am told shelter parents must keep 3 and 4 year olds at home because there are insufficient seats in local 3K/4K centers. The after school is over enrolled and chronically understaffed. There are only 110 spots and some students have transitional difficulties necessitating a high staff to student ratio. PS 124 and schools like it will benefit from the \$12 million recently announced to support schools experiencing an influx of students in temporary housing, but I anticipate this will be a long term need. It is imperative that federal funds continue to be available beyond 2024 and directed towards schools and programs that support children who have experienced severe trauma and displacement.

And finally, federal relief funds are intended in part to address missed learning. Recent results of the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) show a large drop in math scores for 4th graders. Only 18% of NYC's 4th graders are math proficient.³ The pandemic has left students with significant gaps in their math knowledge and application

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<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/over-1-million-fewer-women-in-labor-force.aspx>

² <https://nwlrc.org/resource/women-gain-nearly-two-in-three-jobs-added-to-economy-in-october/>

³ <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2022/10/24/23417176/naep-nyc-math-reading-scores-drop-pandemic-remote-learning-academic-recovery>

that will require continued support. Advocates for Children believes the need could ripple for a decade. Access to Federal Covid funds must be extended to get our future engineers back on track.

Our students require the continuing support of Federal Covid relief funds to address the continuing impact of the pandemic. I have highlighted a few areas of great need such as after school programs, Spanish speaking teachers, social workers, classroom staff to support teachers such as aids and paraprofessionals, and significant math support. I am certain there are many more. Please request an extension of these funds so that NYC students may reap the full benefit of the remaining \$5 billion in Federal Covid relief that is set to expire over the next two years. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

Sincerely,

Antonia Ferraro Martinelli
CEC15 Recording Secretary



The Education Trust—New York

Presented before the New York City Council
Committee on Education

Re: Oversight: NYC DOE's Spending of Federal Covid-19 Relief Funds
November 16, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee. I am Kalima Johnson, Associate Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at The Education Trust—New York. The Education Trust—New York is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps in education. We work to attain educational justice through research, policy, and advocacy that results in all students – especially those from low-income backgrounds and students of color – achieving at high levels from early childhood through college completion.

Students across New York City are now engaged in the most consequential school year in generations, following three years of interrupted instruction due to the pandemic. Recent state assessment data show that most New York City students, particularly those of color and from low-income backgrounds, experienced significant academic setbacks, exacerbating gaps that persisted before COVID-19. An analysis by The Education Trust—New York reveals that last school year just 49% of New York City students tested proficient on state ELA assessments and

38% of students tested proficient on math assessments. Further, while 71% of Asian and 67% of White students scored proficient on ELA assessments, just 37% of Latinx students and 36% of Black students demonstrated proficiency. This discrepancy was also present in math proficiency results with 68% of Asian students and 59% of White students scoring proficient on the math exam, while just 23% of Latinx students and 21% of Black students scored proficient. And while there is an increase in graduation rates, an [analysis](#) by The New York Equity Coalition shows that the use of exemptions by nearly 60% of New York City graduates may reflect systemic inflation in graduation rates.

Recognizing the urgency of the moment, the federal government provided a historic amount of funding to address the challenges facing schools through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. This funding includes the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). New York City's total [ESSER](#) funding allocation totals nearly \$7.7 billion.

Despite the opportunities ESSER funding provides to improve student outcomes, New York City was slow to spend its fiscal year 2022 allocations, as [reported](#) by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. Additionally, the Comptroller reported that New York City has allocated a smaller share of federal aid to address lost instructional time than many other districts across the state and country. The city allocates just over 30% of ARPA funding to the three categories that would address academic recovery.

It's encouraging to see that the Department of Education (DOE) is prioritizing investments in critical areas including allocating 33% of ARPA funding to advance early childhood efforts, allocating 17% of funding for academic recovery and investing \$49 million in ARPA funds into the Early Literacy for All initiative. Still, opportunity gaps and strong specifics about how to address interrupted instruction persist. As the administration works to identify and address areas where there is a need for intervention and support to target federal funds, we would like to offer the following recommendations:

Provide Strategic Academic Support to Students

Last school year's state assessment results underscore the critical need for New York City to drive resources to the students most in need of additional support to master the skills appropriate for their grade level. To help improve student learning, we encourage the administration to:

- Advance efforts in early literacy through evidence-based instruction aligned to the science of reading: [Studies](#) show that students who achieve grade-level proficiency in reading by third grade are four times more likely to complete high school and be effective in their careers. Investments in literacy support can take many forms, including high-quality curriculum, professional learning for educators and use of instructional resources that emphasize phonics and reading comprehension. New York City can also train current educators to be reading coaches and hire reading specialists to support classroom teachers and provide Tier II and Tier III interventions.
- Provide targeted academic and social-emotional support to student subgroups that are performing below proficiency: New York City should leverage new assessment data to design classroom experiences that meet the needs of all learners. New York City should commit to implementing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that addresses the unique needs of students.
- Invest in high quality, evidence-based instructional materials and other resources to accelerate learning in math: New York City should focus on providing students with math experiences that build number sense, algebraic thinking, problem solving and confidence. The administration should provide professional learning resources to in-service teachers with a focus on developing conceptual understandings and differentiating in a classroom of diverse learners.

Provide Data Transparency for Measuring Student Academic Progress

The recently released assessment results serve as a new baseline, and it is important for DOE to provide a clear plan to collect and publish data on student academic progress. We urge the administration to:

- Provide data transparency and a strategy to increase participation in assessments: New York City spends \$36 million on assessments intended to measure student knowledge and monitor their progress. New York City should invest in data transparency platforms that publicly report and track the assessment results at the school, district and citywide level including disaggregated data for all student groups including by race/ethnicity, income status, English learner status, disability status, and housing status. New York City should develop a clear and transparent strategy to increase participation in assessments to pre-

existing pandemic levels. This strategy could include a campaign to increase awareness regarding the value of assessments to all stakeholder groups.

- Provide Data Transparency: The Mayor's Office of Management and Budget has not updated DOE's [stimulus plan](#) since February 2022. DOE's stimulus spending plan is not always transparent. DOE should publicly post its stimulus spending plan and provide real-time updates so that students, families, and other educational stakeholders can evaluate decisions made by the administration.
- Implement a school improvement plan: In 2019, [124 New York City](#) schools were in need of comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement. There is minimal public information regarding whether these schools have improved since their designation or how the DOE is investing in their progress. DOE should publish data regarding the progress of these schools along with a clear school improvement model and plan of action.

Improve equitable access to advanced coursework

Research shows that advanced placement courses are correlated with higher rates of high school graduation and college completion. However, an [analysis](#) by the New York Equity Coalition reveals that Black and Latinx students and students from low-income background do not have access to advanced coursework. To help improve access we encourage the administration to:

- Eliminate enrollment disparities: It is imperative that DOE continues to invest in additional AP, IB, and dual enrollment courses in high-need school districts — including planning time for teachers and equity-driven course enrollment policies. The city should also ensure that any school or school district that has disparities in advanced course enrollment and dual enrollment programs implement an action plan to decrease disproportionality with parent, educator, and student input.
- Support parents and students: The city should require schools to provide every family with clear and concise information, in multiple languages, beginning in the late elementary grades about the courses their child can take in middle and high school to prepare for college, careers, and civic engagement – including the benefits of enrolling in advanced courses and dual enrollment programs.
- Implement automatic enrollment: The city should enable automatic enrollment in the next available advanced course for students who demonstrate readiness using one of multiple measures. Families should have the right to opt out of course work should they wish. This proven practice has been used throughout the country and here in New York as well. In fact, Yonkers Public Schools automatically enroll every eighth-grade student in Algebra I which has contributed to their stable and growing high school graduation rates since 2017.

Create a Pathway to Postsecondary Program

The path to closing access and achievement gaps and creating an equitable and prosperous economic future for all New Yorkers lies in breaking down the barriers between K-12 education, postsecondary education, and careers. Integrating credit-bearing postsecondary opportunities into every high school student's experience is a crucial component of this solution. We encourage the administration to:

- Establish formula funding for Early College High Schools, Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools, and Dual Enrollment programs: This funding should be recurring, and program sustaining and based on a predictable formula that factors enrollment, number of college credits offered or earned (capped at 60), and costs of the tuition-free college credits (not to exceed tuition at CUNY). This funding should also be inclusive of K-12 and higher education costs and disseminated to the high school (e.g. through an early college budget weight) and/or to the college partner.
- Create a process for quality programs to be designated as DOE-approved pathways to postsecondary programs and thus eligible for formula funding: DOE could design qualifying benchmarks for existing pathway to postsecondary programs, including benchmarks that include criteria for serving students who are from low-income backgrounds, students who are first generation college students and/or students who are underrepresented in higher education; providing credit-bearing postsecondary programs free of charge to students; demonstrating a record of credit transfer to public Institutions of Higher Education; and providing counseling, socio-emotional, and academic support services.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you to help provide a more equitable education for all New York City students.

Please contact Kalima Johnson, Associate Director of Advocacy and Partnerships, The Education Trust–New York, at Kjohnson@edtrustny.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



**New York City Council Education Committee Hearing
Oversight: NYC Department of Education's Spending of Federal Covid-19 Relief Funds
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair**

**Federal Dollars Are Being "Saved" at the Expense of Immigrant Youth and Families
November 16th 2022**

Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups serving immigrants and refugees across New York State.

Despite having over \$4 billion in unspent federal dollars available for academic recovery, the New York City FY23 budget was passed with \$469 million in cuts to public school funding at a time when schools are still in crisis mode from the pandemic and students desperately need culturally responsive and healing schools. The increase in asylum seeker enrollment in underfunded schools has widened the gap in funding and further demonstrated that federal dollars are being "saved" at the expense of immigrant youth and families.

Budget Cuts Come as System Must Meet Moment to Support Newcomers

The City must immediately restore the \$469 million to equip our schools so that they are fully prepared to support all youth. Instead of creating budget scarcity, we need to be investing in proven approaches that will support newcomer youth. Additionally, the City must leverage federal funding to allow individual public schools to appeal their enrollment numbers on a



monthly basis, beyond the October 31st audited register, to ensure that there is adequate per pupil funding to meet the needs of the existing students, any asylum seeking students who already have enrolled and those who will enroll in the future.

Over the last two years, the federal government provided over \$7 billion for academic recovery for our schools because they recognized that schools need an abundance of resources – not scarcity – to offset the negative outcomes of the pandemic. The recent arrival of the roughly 8000 newcomer immigrant youth to New York City’s public schools underscores the terrible timing of this summer’s unwarranted budget cuts and the devastating impact of this scarcity mindset. A November analysis by Comptroller Lander outlines how 83% of the 368 schools currently serving newcomer youth across the city “had their budgets cut by DOE last June for this school year, and 36% had an FSF [Fair Student Funding] budget cut of 10% or greater.” Moreover, the most recent enrollment figures reported demonstrate that enrollment declines across the system were vastly smaller than projected, relegating newly arrived students to schools already operating on underfunded budgets.

These budget cuts have caused instability and uncertainty at a time when our public school system should be able to focus on having robust academic recovery programs for our most vulnerable youth and on enrolling asylum-seeking children in high quality schools. The City’s critical task now in supporting newcomer immigrant youth is to ensure that asylum seeker youth are placed in schools that are well-prepared to meet their needs and have deep expertise in supporting students learning English for the first time.

Unfortunately, even though the Department of Education (DOE) is now planning on offering an additional \$12M to schools that have at least six newcomer students enrolled, the



funding schools will receive through School Allocation Memorandum 65 (SAM 65) will pay pennies on the dollar per student, will come with hiring limitations, and most likely will be delayed until January. Comptroller Lander's analysis suggests that there is a \$73,000 discrepancy between full Fair Student Funding Allocations (FSF) and SAM 65 allocations when comparing allocations per pupil per school. Meaning each school serving 6 or more newcomers is robbed of enough funding to cover a full staff member, such as a social worker or a bilingual educator. Furthermore, SAM 65 funding limits the schools' capacity to hire full time employees, as it restricts funding to per diem, per session or educational consultant staff members, delaying schools' ability to hire until at least the January midyear adjustment.

Our schools must be fully funded to meet this moment. New York City has the funding available to plug the gap it created this summer. New York City Comptroller Brad Lander reported in a Fiscal Year-End Analysis that the city has enough Federal funding to "Fully reverse cuts to school budgets and increase deposits to rainy day fund."¹ Lander found \$800 million in FY22 revenues which could be leveraged to prepare for any economic downturn. This would leave \$4.4 billion remaining in federal Covid stimulus aid for education including \$505.6 million that remains yet uncommitted that could be used to easily plug the \$469 million dollar cuts the City needlessly manufactured. Therefore, it is disingenuous to blame these catastrophic cuts on "drying up" federal relief funds or a general lack of school aid funding.² Federal funds alone could keep schools whole and ensure that the city can make holistic investments to help our youth heal.

¹

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptrollers-fiscal-year-end-analysis-shows-city-has-funds-to-fully-reverse-cuts-to-school-budgets-and-increase-deposits-to-rainy-day-fund/>

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-01/nyc-tax-revenue-to-exceed-estimate-by-3-billion-lander-says>



ELLs and Immigrant Families

In addition, the city has not fully invested in proven models, like the LIFE Project and English Language Learner programs in transfer schools, that provide access to programs that directly address the strengths and unique challenges they face and support their enrollment in school.

Amidst the City's hand-wringing over enrollment declines this past year, it ignored two practical best-practice interventions that would have potentially brought thousands of immigrant youth into the system. The city could have dramatically expanded access for immigrant youth through a \$4 million investment in the Linking Immigrant Families to Early Childhood Education (LIFE) Project - to offer community based supports for 3k and PreK enrollment. Additionally, the city should have prioritized a \$2.1 million dollar investment in the First Step Newcomer Transfer School model - to expand access for older newcomers in schools close to where they live and work. It must make these investments this year to ensure equitable access to quality programs for all New York City's youth.

The NYIC has successfully piloted the LIFE project for the last five years through our CBO partners - Masa, LSA Family Health Service, and Fifth Avenue Committee - in close collaboration with the DOE's outreach team. A \$4M investment into a citywide LIFE Project would enable 20 CBOs to conduct a massive outreach effort to inform immigrant families of their eligibility for Pre-K and 3-K programs, meeting families where they are. These programs then work in conjunction with the DOE to provide one-on-one intensive support to LEP parents, taking them through the entire process from learning about school options to enrolling in their program of choice. They support parents with early interventions for students with disabilities, provide extensive referral services to help families of young children



access the support they need, and provide this assistance through trusted community-based organizations with the necessary cultural and linguistic capabilities. New York City is home to around 156,000 parents of children ages 0-4 who are limited English proficient, with a staggering 100,000 parents of this age group lacking access to a computer, and around 61,000 lacking access to the internet. Without the additional, proven supports provided by programs like LIFE, many of these children never make it into the early childhood programs the City has invested in, further exacerbating the enrollment death spiral.

Additionally, for many years, New York City's immigrant youth have been dropping out of school in staggering numbers, at a rate now almost five times that of their native English-speaking peers because they don't have access to the supportive school programs that they need. This is particularly devastating given the fact that English Language Learners have the potential to outperform native English-speaking peers when given the right supports. Moreover, some immigrants struggle to access quality programs more than others. Older, newcomer immigrant youth ages 16-21 have little time to learn English and fulfill graduation requirements before they age out. And unfortunately, they have struggled far too long to enroll in our public school system. Up until last year, transfer schools in the outer boroughs that specialize in supporting youth at risk of dropping out and helping older, under-credited students succeed had not been accessible to immigrant youth.

This year, by opening six new ELL Transfer School programs in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn, the DOE took an exciting and crucial step in addressing the longstanding gap in programs close to where older immigrant youth live and work. However, these programs are in their infancy and don't yet have the full funding necessary to train all teachers on how to



support immigrant students with gaps in their learning let alone to offer comprehensive mental health and wrap-around supports.

Finally, incoming asylum seekers of all ages must also be placed in schools that are experienced and fully equipped to meet their complex needs. For those who have been here for 2 years already, and for those arriving now, New York City must fully fund the schools that best serve our newcomers and continue to enhance and expand innovative models for our older newcomer youth.

Budget Cuts Are Unnecessary and Cruel

New York City public school cuts are unnecessary and cruel. It is unconscionable that the City has plunged school leaders and staff into a completely manufactured crisis after three of the most difficult years in the history of public education. These cuts are resulting in real harm to students' academic, social and emotional well being. Children from historically underserved schools and communities — which suffered disproportionately during COVID — should not be punished further for minor enrollment drops.

It is incomprehensible to cut public school funding when we have ample federal funds available right now. Cutting school funding based on enrollment will continue to hurt schools, and the impacts to school budgets have already been felt. The cuts to schools will lead to more students dropping out and/or more families choosing charter and private schools, leading to further enrollment problems and further cuts - an enrollment death cycle. Principals have shared they have had to close arts and enrichment programs and cannot hire needed staff. The majority of schools are being affected and students, parents, and educators are feeling the pain now. Now is not the time for an austerity budget, for taking away the teacher who's been a child's one source of stability, for cutting the counselor



helping a child work through the death of their parent, for making a principal's job even harder, completely unnecessarily. Now is the time to make investments in our children's education and the workforce, services, resources, and opportunities that help our students thrive.

Conclusion

The City has up to now chosen to “save” federal dollars at the expense of improving immigrant education. We must continue to invest in expanding access for immigrant youth to quality programs. Unless programs are designed to meet the unique challenges faced by newcomer immigrant youth, thousands of young people will never unlock their full potential. Immigrant youth need healing-centered schools; trauma-informed practices; culturally responsive and linguistically diverse educators and staff; arts; healthy food; and academic programming to support their language development. In FY23, the City must leverage federal funds to finally make schools whole and ensure all communities can provide the additional services needed for immigrant children to recover, heal, and thrive. Finally, the City cannot continue to under invest in enrollment and community engagement and then use low enrollments to justify school budget cuts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

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New York Immigration Coalition

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TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF LOCAL 372 | NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES
DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 | AFSCME
TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION OVERSIGHT HEARING
ON THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION’S SPENDING
OF FEDERAL COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS
NOVEMBER 16, 2022
1:00 PM

Education Committee Chairwoman Rita Joseph and distinguished members of the committee. I am Glenys Rivers, 2nd Vice President of Local 372 - NYC Board of Education Employees, District Council 37 | AFSCME. On behalf of the approximately 24,000 members Local 372 represents, under the leadership of President, Shaun D. Francois I., thank you for this opportunity to testify in regards to Department of Education’s (“DOE’s”) utilization of COVID-19 relief funds.

School districts in New York state received a total of more than \$14 billion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (“CRRSA”), and the American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”). Altogether, New York City received \$7.66 billion in education funding, with \$6.9 billion of that coming in the second and third rounds of funding.¹ According to City Comptroller Brad Lander, the DOE had \$4.4 billion remaining in unspent COVID-19 stimulus aid that must be spent by FY 2025.²

¹ <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/press/releases/2022/11/dinapoli-report-finds-big-five-school-districts-use-pandemic-aid-reflects-different-priorities>

² <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptrollers-fiscal-year-end-analysis-shows-city-has-funds-to-fully-reverse-cuts-to-school-budgets-and-increase-deposits-to-rainy-day-fund/>

As of today, thousands of Local 372 support staff who performed essential support services for students and communities throughout the pandemic have received no compensation from the COVID-19 relief funds to compensate them with retro-active hazard pay. These men and women answered the call – at personal risk of exposure to COVID-19 and its subsequent strains – because their selflessness and dedication to the children and communities they serve. And now, they are being forgotten.

When the school system was closed at the height of the pandemic, many of the 9,000 School Lunch Workers and 2,600 School Crossing Guards remained on the job. School Crossing Guards protected pedestrians throughout the City, and School Lunch Workers fed over a million meals to students and members of the community in need. It is an understatement to say that these workers went above and beyond their normal job duties and put their health on the line to help this great city.

Once the schools reopened midway through the pandemic, all Local 372's members came willing back to work to contribute to the on-the-ground efforts to restore a new normalcy in our public schools. School Aids engaged students all throughout the day: greeting the children in the morning, engaging in numerous activities to support their educational development, and helping the children get to their buses at the end of the day. Our Community Titles, including Parent Coordinators, School Neighborhood Workers, and Paraprofessionals, resumed working with parents to navigate the DOE, and work with the Department of Homeless Services to make sure the children arrived to school safely after months and months of home schooling and hybrid

schedules. And, Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (“SAPIS”) work with students to address a compounding issue of a new mental health crisis that isolation and insecurity placed on students and families.

Many Local 372 members came to work, whether sick, traumatized, or having lost a loved one. Hazard pay won’t restore everything, but these workers deserve fair, appropriate compensation in acknowledgement of their service and sacrifice to our students and communities.

In addition to the lack of hazard pay, I want to especially highlight that our students are facing a greater mental health crisis than ever before caused by COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns. It is critical to monitor children’s mental health, as well as promote coping and resilience skills, and to expand access to services in order to support children’s overall mental health. The SAPIS program has been, and continues to be best-equipped to shoulder this responsibility. The DOE should, and must, therefore allocate COVID-19 relief resources to increase the availability of SAPIS in our public schools.

Since 1971, SAPIS have provided essential social-emotional strategies and services to help youth remain learning-ready. SAPIS are already trained and ready to respond to this COVID-19 mental health crisis. SAPIS have *always* been proactive in providing students and their families with the tools to navigate the myriad of societal, personal, and peer pressures that can derail healthy academic, social, and individual development. SAPIS are also responsible for monitoring behavior, as well as offering resources and services to support students when they find themselves struggling to improve. SAPIS are more versatile and cost-effective as compared to social workers,

whom are not trained to provide the same broad range of one-on-one and group-based services and programming. It is estimated that each individual SAPIS can directly reach approximately 500 at-risk students.

More than ever, in this current environment of violence on the streets and in the schools, New York City cannot afford to neglect this important work as the number of SAPIS positions. There must be a concerted effort to restore SAPIS numbers to their peak. You have the power and authority to ensure our children's needs are met and so they can fully exceed in reaching their potential. Without SAPIS, students in crisis are being robbed of their opportunity to a quality, competitive education, and ultimately, their futures. The City must do more to combat today's urgent mental health crisis, and that is why the DOE should invest COVID-19 relief resources into SAPIS.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of Local 372 NYC Board of Education Employees and its membership to discuss the importance of both hazard pay for our essential workers and investing in SAPIS positions as they relate to unspent COVID-19 resources available to the DOE. I welcome any questions you all may have.

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I represent: NYC Independent Budget Office

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Name: LEONARD VADSKAKA

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I represent: ADAYA, CDC

Address: 33 23 CHAMBERS ST. BROOKLYN NY 11217

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Name: Seritta Scott

Address: 52 Chambers St.

I represent: NYC DOE

Address: 52 Chambers St

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Name: Glenys Rivera

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I represent: Local 372 / DC-37

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