

### Testimony of the New York City Department of Education on District 79 Programs & Adult Education Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

April 19, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and Members of the City Council Committee on Education here today. My name is Glenda Esperance, and I am the proud Superintendent of District 79 (D79) Alternative Schools and Programs at New York City Public Schools (NYCPS). I am joined by Jacqueline Jones, Deputy Superintendent of District 79 and Annette Knox, Executive Director of Adult Education. We are pleased to be here today to discuss our work on the range of D79 programs and our efforts to provide high-quality adult educational programming to New York City residents. I thank the City Council and particularly Chair Joseph for your support of District 79 and Adult Education Programs.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to tell you about my background and how I came to this essential work. I was born and raised in Brooklyn to immigrant parents and am a proud product of NYC Public Schools. I come here with 40 years of experience in public education as a student, a special education and adult education teacher, Literacy Coach, Assistant Principal, Principal, Director of School Quality, Director of Special Education, and Superintendent. My broad and intense knowledge of academic and social emotional learning inspires me to identify, rectify, and find ways to navigate the barriers that some of our students' face. As the leader of D79, I endeavor each day to ensure that enriched opportunities become the standard for all students regardless of zip code, classification, or demographics.

### **Overview of District 79**

District 79 is a citywide district comprised of 10 distinctive programs serving approximately 50,000 students. Our programs operate in around 350 sites located across the city, from multi-classroom sites co-located in large educational campuses with NYCPS high schools, to individual classrooms in community-based organizations or other partner agencies.

Many of our students were disconnected from school prior to enrolling in our programs and had unfulfilled educational experiences. We serve a population in which nearly 80 percent of our students, or their families, qualify for HRA benefits, and more than one out of ten are in temporary housing. D79 programs are focused on changing their trajectory by empowering our students and equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

Our district's priority is to provide targeted support that addresses the individual needs of our students. In doing so, we help students:



- Earn a high school diploma, high school equivalency (HSE) and/or Career and Technical Education (CTE) certification.
- Build the skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary opportunities, including career and college.
- Provide supports and interventions that help students gain the social-emotional skills necessary to become confident and productive members of society.

### District 79 programs include the following strands:

- Career and Technical Education at Coop Tech
- Services for Student Parents at LYFE (Living for the Young Family through Education)
- Restart Middle Schools, which have services for our over-age/under-credit middle school students
- The Judith S. Kaye HS and YABC (Young Adult Borough Center), which provide services for overage/under-credited students working towards earning a HS diploma
- Pathways to Graduation serving our under-21 students to get their High School Equivalency Diploma
- Students Serving Superintendent Suspensions receiving services through our Alternate Learning Centers
- Youth Justice and Treatment, which includes ReStart Academy, Passages Academy and East River Academy
- Our District's Adult Education program, which serves our 21 and over learners.

### **Adult Education**

D79's Adult Education program is committed to empowering New York City's adults in their pursuit of knowledge and helping students earn gateway credentials toward career opportunities. My motivation for this work is rooted in a story about a young lady name Ella, who migrated from Haiti to NYC for a better life for herself and her family. Although she had been a teacher in Haiti for over 10 years, upon her arrival to New York City, Ella had to start over because she did not know the language and her credentials were not acknowledged in the United States.

Whenever possible, Ella worked odd jobs, off the books, to pay for her day-to-day living expenses. In the evenings, she took free English Learner Literacy classes at a church on Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn. Her transition was no easy feat. However, her persistent and consistent exposure to high-quality instruction paid off. Today, Ella is fluent in English and her improved Basic Education Literacy skills enabled her to obtain U.S, residency, steady employment with benefits, and permanent housing. Ella is my mother and the beginning of her journey mirrors



many of our students in Adult Education who are in pursuit of the American Dream. They have the desire to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Our adult education student body represents the rich diverse beauty of the City. Last year, we served students representing more than 190 countries. The average age of an Adult and Continuing Education student is 39. Sixty-two percent of our students are women, and 24 percent are parents. Almost 70 percent are low income.

The majority of students we serve in adult education, roughly 65 percent, are seeking English as a Second Language (ESOL) support, and many enter our program performing at the lowest English proficiency levels. ESOL instruction teaches students basic language and academic skills they will need to successfully complete higher education or job training programs. In addition, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) classes prepare students for the high school equivalency test. Our adult learners can participate in classes at any of our sites across all five boroughs.

The majority of Adult and Continuing Education programs are funded by a prescriptive New York State Employment Preparation Education (EPE) grant from the New York State Education Department (NYSED). This grant provides more than \$30 million in annual funding. In addition, Federal funding for Adult and Continuing Education includes a five-year Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant and others for a total of approximately \$5 million. We also received almost \$16 million in City funding this year to support adult education services.

### New and Expanded Initiatives

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the challenges posed by the COVID-19 took a toll on each of us. The interrupted instruction and other upheaval and trauma shined a glaring light on the need for our adult education programs to continue prioritizing high quality academic instruction and emotional support for students and staff.

Under Chancellor Banks' leadership, we have implemented several new initiatives to strengthen Adult Education programming and supports and are pleased with the progress being made while recognizing that we have more work to do. Specifically, we have launched new initiatives and expanded our efforts on these existing priorities:

### **Enrollment Hubs**

In 2022, we launched ten Enrollment Hubs to increase access to programming, provide more enrollment connections, improve retention, and elevate student outcomes. Now, there is at least one Enrollment Hub located in each borough. The Adult Education Enrollment Hubs are targeted points of entry for access, assessment, and referral to Adult Education sites. They create a



uniform enrollment process to maximize enrollment effectively, providing consistent communication, an efficient mechanism for timely referral and enrollment follow-up, and a supportive environment that promotes student engagement. In addition, our Enrollment Hub staff engage students with the completion of the enrollment process, building students' confidence and commitment to the Adult Education community.

To ensure that New Yorkers are aware of the services and opportunities available to them via Adult Education, we deploy eight full-time community liaisons. Their primary responsibility is to engage with community leaders and other City agencies while attending events throughout the city to advertise class availability. In addition, Adult and Continuing Education partners with other divisions within the NYCPS in conducting outreach. We have also begun to streamline our messaging to students through an outreach team that more intentionally communicates our focus on helping students earn their High School Equivalency diplomas.

### **Professional Development**

All Adult Education classes are taught by certified teachers, and we have prioritized curriculum and professional development for our teachers. More recently, we have re-committed to ensuring our programs provide curricula strictly aligned to the standards and skills students need for their High School Equivalency exams. We have created structures to provide our teachers with constructive feedback and coaching so they can effectively prepare our students to obtain their diplomas. Additionally, we provide targeted professional learning for our school leaders centered on building staff capacity, tiered instruction, and progress monitoring.

All school leaders are required to create a Quality Education Plan that provides each site with targeted goals connected to attendance, instruction, social emotional learning and community engagement, as well as action steps and progress-monitoring tools. We recognize that students progressing through our programs face many challenges, including the grade-level proficiency at which they may be entering the program. Therefore, we have provided professional learning on High Leverage Practices to support ALL students. We have also partnered with the NYCPS Special Education Central team to ensure that the city's initiative to effectively screen dyslexia extends beyond K-12. We have already conducted site visits and are finalizing details of our pilot program tailored to meet the needs of our 21 and over population. In addition, we created a Social and Emotional Handbook that provides abundant resources for teachers to incorporate into their classroom daily.

### **Individualized Social Emotional Supports**

The pandemic impact on all our students extended far beyond academics, and that applies as well to our adult education students. We deploy our case managers across all boroughs as community resources for staff to conduct informational workshops for students covering relevant issues



while helping to refer and connect students to local agencies and service providers. In cases where students could not attend school due to childcare issues, case managers have assisted by connecting them to the LYFE program, which offers consistent high-quality early childhood education services for the children aged six weeks to three years of student parents. That support enables student parents to attend class regularly, improving their futures and those of their children.

Our case managers also help get experienced students back on tracking a variety of ways. For example, they identify students who may have earned an engineering degree from their home country and enroll them in programs designed to put them on a path to rebuild their careers here in New York City. When our students have struggled with health issues or food scarcity, our case managers have referred them to essential health care treatment and food pantry programs to ensure their basic needs are met. It is clear how vital these services are in supporting our students' paths to success, and we continue to explore ways to enhance their impact and expand our number of case managers in Adult Education.

Our four Literacy Zones in our Adult Education Learning Centers in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn provide support in social services, financial literacy, legal services, and many other needs, in addition to hosting job and health fairs.

We also have an Adult Education Student Advisory committee, which meets with the Superintendent team to discuss and offer suggestions on student resources, curriculum, climate, and culture, and more. This committee offers invaluable insight into the needs and aspirations of our students, directly from their perspective. As a direct result of input from this committee, we purchased technology and hired a district immigration advocacy team to provide guidance to students in the program.

### **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

Adult Education also has an expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) program serving students across the city. Our CTE program is specifically focused on workforce development: students who complete our classes gain industry knowledge and State certifications, in addition to earning their diploma. This program allows students to pursue meaningful employment and/or post-secondary education with course offerings ranging from basic computer literacy to certified nursing assistant, automotive, and construction programs. We have also worked to expand our offerings to include additional certifications focused on preparing students for participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy such as communications media, computer graphics technology, solar panel repair, fashion apparel and design engineering, and much more.

### **Supporting Asylum Seekers**



We are intentional in aligning our efforts in support of the city's comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of asylum seekers who arrived in the five boroughs since last spring. We continue to collaborate with NYCPS STH (Students in Temporary Housing) and FWC staff to ensure that they have clear and constant communication about Adult Education opportunities to support families who live in shelters. Currently, we work with and support DHS (Department of Human Services) and HERCC leadership in opening additional sites to serve their residents as needed with partnerships at two HERCC sites and five DHS sites. Our team has written a program implementation plan that provides guidance on the required action steps and personnel for the effective opening of a program.

### **Strategic Partnerships to Support Customized Programming**

We recognize that data points alone do not tell the whole story, so conversations with community stakeholders have been a vital part of our next steps for expansion. We have been meeting with Community Superintendents and Community Elected Officials for guidance in creating customized programming. These discussions have been extremely important because they will help build a more accurate picture of the needs of each neighborhood. We will use the insight from our assessments and discussions from community stakeholders to leverage resources across agencies to make our adult education program one of the best in New York State. Each successful outcome will be a result of effective collaboration to build a culture of trust between students, staff, and community members.

### **Proposed Legislation**

I will now turn to the proposed legislation. Regarding Introduction 198 by Council Member Salamanca, the Administration supports the intent of this bill. We recognize the importance of equipping our school health nurses and staff with the proper resources and training for any medical situation that may arise. For this reason, the Office of School Health has already begun preparations to stock naloxone and train staff in its administration by the start of the 2023 school year. The data overwhelmingly suggests that overdoses are extremely rare among NYC youth. Overdose deaths for those aged 15 to 18 accounted for less than 0.2% of overdose deaths citywide in 2021. Our recommendation is to stock naloxone in high schools only.

### Conclusion

We are committed to ensuring that NYC residents have access to a high-quality education. The trajectory of our programs over the last four years has demonstrated immense progress and we are confident that these trends will are continue in a positive direction. We greatly appreciate the partnership with Chair Joseph in thinking and working holistically on these efforts to enhance the Adult Education experience in her district and citywide. We look forward to our continued partnership with the City Council in this vital work.



### United Federation of Teachers' Testimony to the New York City Council Education Committee's Oversight Hearing on District 79 and Adult Education

### April 19, 2023

On behalf of UFT members and our union president, Michael Mulgrew, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical issue.

We are proud to represent the staff of District 79, a group of programs and schools that serves young people and families facing enormous challenges. In addition to the staff who support the district's adult education students, the focus of our testimony, our D79 educators across the city also work with students in multiple programs tailored to serve their unique needs, including:

- The LYFE program, for young people who are new parents.
- The Restart program, for students in drug rehabilitation and temporary or involuntary settings.
- The East River Academy, for incarcerated students at Rikers Island.
- Passages Academy, for students 17 years old and younger detained in secure and nonsecure facilities.
- The Judith S. Kaye Transfer School, which serves students ages 16–21 who are preparing for high school, a high-school equivalency, or a trade certification.
- The School of Cooperative Technical Education, a career and technical education program.
- Pathways to Graduation, one of the city's main GED programs.
- Young Adult Borough Centers, programs to help students make up credits.
- Alternate Learning Centers (ALC), which serve middle school and high school students who have been suspended.

These programs ensure our educational system offers all our city's families the opportunity to complete their education in the New York City public school system.

Of particular note for today's hearing are the District 79 programs that serve adult learners in the city. These programs, which are funded through a mix of city and state



dollars, currently provide more than 900 tuition-free classes for eligible students 21 and older who have not earned a U.S. high school diploma or the equivalent. Our members in these programs conduct morning, afternoon and evening classes, Monday through Saturday, at more than 175 sites in all five boroughs.

We have several recommendations for increasing the reach of this important program. First, we must increase our focus on recruitment, with partnerships with other agencies and organizations, for the adult education program. In recent years, advertising for the program has been via print ads in locations such as taxicabs, which do not reach many potential participants: they don't frequent those locations or they struggle with reading.

We suggest a return to in-person recruitment in venues such as family shelters, public housing, construction sites, and housing for newly arrived migrants, along with collaboration with agencies and community organizations that serve potential adult education students. Partners can include social-service and immigrant-service organizations, unemployment agencies, construction unions, the NAACP, and religious communities, all of which could serve as effective bridges between our adult education programs and New Yorkers who could benefit from them. To improve both recruitment and the classes themselves, we also recommend hiring more bilingual educators and staff to connect outreach programs with a broader range of potential participants.

Second, we recommend increasing the number of adult education classes in public school buildings during afternoon hours, especially during times when parents could attend these classes while their children are finishing their school day or participating in after-school programs. Most adult education classes in school buildings are now scheduled either from 9 a.m. to noon or from 5:40 to 8 p.m., neither of which is ideal for parents of young children. We particularly recommend a return to more early afternoon classes (12:30 – 3 p.m.), so students enrolled in adult education can finish in time for evening work shifts or pick up from child care.



Third, we recommend the DOE create a joint advisory committee on adult education to discuss other improvements to this program. The committee should include stakeholders such as the NAACP, religious organizations, and community-based organizations who work with adult education students, as well as the unions that represent the staff of these programs. The committee must ensure the leadership of adult education is structured in a way that meets the needs of both students and staff. Discussions that bring together these voices with decision-makers at the DOE could greatly improve the relevance and effectiveness of the adult education opportunities provided in District 79.

Finally, we invite members of the City Council to join our District 79 team as we visit the programs and sites that make up this division. It is important that our elected leaders see realistic day-to-day conditions for students, such as those at East River Academy and Passages Academy, who are part of the justice system. We would welcome the opportunity to coordinate these visits and look forward to working with you to ensure that the students, families, and staff in District 79 receive the resources and support they need to succeed and thrive.

Int 0198-2022 CM Rafael Salamanca Jr Res 0083-2022 CM James F. Gennaro

**Committee on Education** 

#### **Summaries of Local Laws:**

**Local Law 0198-2022** amends the Administrative Code of the City of New York to mandate that the Department of Education stock opioid antagonists in all school buildings.

**Res 0083-2022** calls upon the Mayor's Office and New York City DOE to recognize and observe the important Sikh holiday, Vaisakhi, on April 13 each year.

### **Statement of Support**

The United States is in the midst of an opioid overdose epidemic, and opioid-involved death rates have increased significantly since the beginning of the pandemic. It is a matter of extreme urgency that opioid antagonists such as Narcan are stocked in schools. These drugs now are available as a nasal spray for which New York State no longer requires a prescription; the surgeon general recommends everyone carry them; and they are provided for free at all pharmacies.

We have fought prior efforts to require school communities to administer an ever-growing list of medications without the necessary oversight, staff and expertise. We view such efforts as an attempt to provide medical services to students on the cheap; such attempts in other school districts have resulted in unreasonable demands on staff and poor outcomes for students. Narcan and the EpiPen are the two exceptions for the following reasons: 1) because death is immediate without intervention; 2) because administering the drug unnecessarily does not harm the recipient; and 3) because we are in the middle of a opioid-overdose epidemic. With assurances that staff who administer these antagonists do not bear liability and that the Council is empowered to mandate this change, the UFT supports the bill amending the Administrative Code of the City of New York to mandate that the DOE stock opioid antagonists in all school buildings.

In addition, the UFT wants all New York City public school students to feel that their traditions and cultures are recognized, and therefore we also support the resolution to recognize and observe the important Sikh holiday, Vaisakhi, on April 13 each year.

FOR THE AFOREMENTIONED REASONS, THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS SUPPORTS THE PASSAGE OF THIS BILL AND THIS RESOLUTION.

Int 0354-2022 CM Kevin Riley Committee on Education

### **Summary of Local Law:**

**Local Law 0354-2022.** This bill would create the Office of Continuing Education and Adult Literacy. The office would be responsible for coordinating and promoting adult educational and literacy services within the five boroughs, including, but not limited to, adult educational programming for the immigrant community, wraparound services for adults pursuing education, resources and programs to enhance digital and technological literacy, and classes to help with basic language and education exams required to advance in careers.

### **Statement of Opposition**

The UFT is a strong supporter of adult education and is proud to represent the educators in the DOE's District 79 program, which currently provide more than 900 tuition-free classes for eligible adult students who have not earned a U.S. high school diploma or equivalency. Our members in this program offer morning, afternoon and evening classes Monday through Saturday at more than 175 sites in all five boroughs.

As currently written, this bill does not support the adult education program we already have and would instead shift coordination of these services away from where it properly belongs — within the city agency responsible for education. Our current adult education program does need to grow in some of the ways described in this bill, including more effective recruitment of students. To this end, we recommend partnerships with other agencies and groups such as social service and immigrant-service organizations, unemployment agencies, construction unions, the NAACP and religious communities, all of which can serve as effective bridges between our adult education programs and the New Yorkers who would benefit from them.

To meet these goals, however, we believe that instead of passing a bill to create a new Office of Continuing Education and Adult Literacy with staff and leadership selected by the mayor, the better approach would be for the DOE and the City Council to create a Joint Advisory Committee on Adult Education to discuss improvements for this program. Such a group should include stakeholders who work with adult education students, such as the NAACP, religious organizations and community-based organizations; the unions who represent the staff of these programs; and representatives from other relevant city agencies. Ongoing discussions about this program, which would bring these voices together with decision-makers at the DOE, could greatly improve the relevance and effectiveness of adult education opportunities without further adding to the city's bureaucracy.

FOR THE AFOREMENTIONED REASONS, THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS OPPOSES THE PASSAGE OF THIS BILL.



### **KCS Testimony for City Council Committee on Education**

Date: 04.19.2023

Objective: Testify in Support for KCS's Education Department

Location: Submitting a Written Testimony Only

Organization: Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS)

Testimony:

Hello Committee Members. My name is Josh Bentley and I am a Grants and Advocacy Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS) is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area. Our mission is to be a nexus of service for these communities, helping them maintain their health and wellbeing.

Our services reach across the five boroughs and are centered around the areas of education, public health, workforce, immigration, and aging. As our organization has grown, adapted, and evolved, so has our programming and the departments that provide said services.

In particular, our Education Department has expanded its services to now include English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, immigration and citizenship assistance, Korean

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37-06 111th St, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 718-651-9220

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language courses for those looking to deepen their connection to Korean culture, and cultural programming to offer pathways for cultural exchange with other underrepresented communities.

These programs have provided service to many immigrant, under-resourced, and minority individuals. With our organization's origins as a settlement house, we take immense pride in ensuring that underrepresented individuals can thrive in their homes and communities. Our Education Department plays a crucial role in this mission.

A recent client of our Education Department was asked how our services helped her, and this was her response:

"Hello, My name is Divana and I wanted to share my immigrant experience. Although I am Colombian, I was living in Tijuana Mexico with my husband and two kids before we came to the U.S. Me and my husband wanted to move to the U.S. because the Mexican guerilla army attacked my home making it unsafe for my family. We hired a coyote (a person who smuggles immigrants across the Mexico—United States border) and paid \$12,000 to cross the border into Texas but the coyote stole \$5,000 of the \$12,000 we paid so we had to pay an additional \$7,000. We arrived in Texas in December of 2022. We were sent to a shelter and they relocated us to NYC because my brother in law had a place we could stay. Due to personal reasons I split up with my husband and me and my kids had to leave my brother-in-law's house. After looking for another place to stay, we found a shelter in Manhattan which only provides bad quality frozen food that is unhealthy for me and my kids. By that time, I only had one year to apply for Asylum so I

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went to KCS to learn English and find immigration services. Eventually I managed to get a job working for a currency exchange shop but because I don't have any legal

documents and low level English skills they only paid me \$11 per hour. I still work there every week from 4pm-8pm, multiple times a week and they allow me to bring my children here while I work. Although I found a lawyer to help with legal status and legal authorization for employment, I am still struggling with my day to day life. What really concerns me is my son who is stressed and not studying because of our living situation and because his father is not with us."

It is evident that this client still faces immense hardship, as do her children. But our services - namely our Education Department - are committed to serving her and countless others facing similar circumstances.

Our departments must be supported however. Thus, I am asking for your support as a Committee, to provide funding through the Discretionary budget of the City Council so that these invaluable services can continue, expand, and improve. Thank you.

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### Three demands Adult and Continuing Education

- 1. Restore the city-wide unified, umbrella adult literacy organization for NYC, including DOE, CUNY, the library system, the Community Based Organizations, Department of Youth and Community Development, and Consortium for Worker Education.
- 2. Restore the clearing house to coordinate the above organizations. (formerly the Literacy Assistance Center)
- 3. Union representation for all adult literacy workers city-wide, with the goal of providing full-time jobs with benefits.
- 4. Administration of the program shall require background experience and training in adult language and literacy

-Office of Adult and Continuing Education

New York City was formerly a leader in the field of adult education. Our staff, teachers and supervisors, counselors, guards, and secretaries were all specialists in the field of education for adults, a very different field from education for children. The students bring their life knowledge and specific demands to the school the process of education is thus interactive. The Office of Adult and Continuing Education should be restored to its former proficiency and other adult education agencies in the city should be included in that project.

Four demands must be met if adult and continuing education are to properly serve the communities who need these services.

- 1. Restore the city-wide unified, umbrella adult literacy organization for NYC, including DOE, CUNY, the library system, the Community Based Organizations, Department of Youth and Community Development, and Consortium for Worker Education.
- 2. Restore the clearing house to coordinate the above organizations. (the former iteration of the Literacy Assistance Center). Techniques, problems, solutions, and materials can be exchanged at such a clearing house.
- 3. Union representation for all adult literacy workers city-wide, with the goal of providing full-time jobs with benefits. Thus, staff will be able to devote themselves to bettering their work and to being of use to their students.
- 4. Administrators of the program must have background experience and training in adult language and literacy and respect for the students as knowledgeable human beings who are aware of their own needs.

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