

Committee on Education

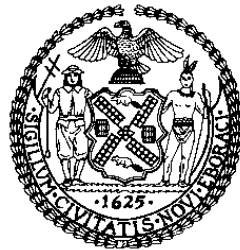
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**The Council of the City of New York**

**BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION**

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**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Hon. Mark Treyger, *Chair*

**May 27, 2020**

**Oversight: Remote Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City's Schools**

## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 27, 2020, the Committee on Education, chaired by Council Member Mark Treyger, will conduct an oversight hearing on “Remote Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City’s Schools.” Witnesses invited to testify include representatives of the Department of Education (DOE), students, parents, educators, unions, advocates, and other interested stakeholders.

## **BACKGROUND**

### *COVID-19*

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan China.<sup>1</sup> The name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> Scientists believe that COVID-19 is spread from human to human through the respiratory tract when a person coughs or sneezes.<sup>3</sup> The first confirmed case in New York State was on Sunday, March 1, 2020, which also represents the first positive case in New York City as the infected person was a Manhattan resident.<sup>4</sup> According to the most recent available data by the New York State Department of Health, as of Sunday, May 24, 2020, there were 608 new cases of COVID-19 in New York City (for a total of 198,731 positive cases since the onset of the pandemic) and 1,249

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). “WHO Director-General's remarks at the media briefing on 2019-nCoV on 11 February 2020,” February 11, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-2019-ncov-on-11-february-2020>.

<sup>2</sup> United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Frequently Asked Questions.” Accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#Coronavirus-Disease-2019-Basics>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> West, M., “First Case of Coronavirus Confirmed in New York State.” *Wall Street Journal*. March 1, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/first-case-of-coronavirus-confirmed-in-new-york-state-11583111692>

new cases of COVID-19 in New York State (for a total of 362,764 positive cases since the onset of the pandemic).<sup>5</sup>

### *School Closure and Introduction of Remote Learning*

On Sunday, March 15, 2020, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that effective Monday, March 16, New York City public schools would be closed until at least April 20, 2020, in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo also announced on March 15 that New York City schools, as well as those in Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk, would close and further stated that “New York City must develop a plan within the next 24 hours to ensure children who rely on school breakfast and lunch programs will continue to receive that support, and parents - especially critical healthcare workers and first responders - will be provided access to child care as needed.”<sup>7</sup> On March 16, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 202.4 which ordered all schools in New York State closed until April 1, 2020.<sup>8</sup>

In announcing the city school closure, Mayor de Blasio, along with Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, laid out the following schedule for transition to remote learning:

- March 16: Citywide closure. Students, teachers, and principals do not report to school buildings.
- March 17 - March 19: Teachers and principals participate in professional development on remote learning.
- March 19 - March 20: Students who need it will be able to begin the process of picking up the technology necessary for remote learning. Additional guidance for families will be sent this week.

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<sup>5</sup> See New York State Department of Health COVID-19 Tracker. Accessed at: <https://covid19tracker.health.ny.gov/views/NYS-COVID19-Tracker/NYSDOHCOVID-19Tracker-Map?%3Aembed=yes&%3Atoolbar=no&%3Atabs=n>.

<sup>6</sup> Office of the Mayor press release, “New York City to Close All School Buildings and Transition to Remote Learning,” March 15, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/151-20/new-york-city-close-all-school-buildings-transition-remote-learning>.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the Governor press release, “Governor Cuomo Announces All New York City, Westchester, Suffolk and Nassau Public Schools Will Close This Week to Limit Spread of COVID-19,” March 15, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-all-new-york-city-westchester-suffolk-and-nassau-public-schools-will>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.governor.ny.gov/executive-orders>.

- March 23: Remote learning launches, with additional guidance provided throughout the week of the 23rd.<sup>9</sup>

In response to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases throughout March to more than 130,000 statewide, on April 7, 2020, Governor Cuomo signed Executive Order No. 202.14, which extended and directed schools to stay closed through April 29th.<sup>10</sup> The Governor's final action with relation to keeping schools closed was on May 17, 2020, when he signed Executive Order No. 202.28 which mandated that all schools in the state would remain closed for the remainder of the current school year.<sup>11</sup> The Mayor and Chancellor, citing projections by health experts that COVID-19 transmission would likely continue through the end of the school year and the need for parents to have some sense of predictability, announced a five-point plan and commitments for i) extending remote learning through the end of the school year which included ensuring that every student that requested an internet-enabled device received one by the end of April; ii) ensuring that parents could ask and get answers to questions about remote learning; iii) a commitment from the DOE to continue to invest in instructional resources, enrichment programs, and student supports for families to engage in learning at home; iv) ensuring that every high school senior would be supported towards graduation; and v) a commitment to reopening schools stronger than ever in September.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Office of the Mayor press release, "New York City to Close All School Buildings and Transition to Remote Learning," March 15, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/151-20/new-york-city-close-all-school-buildings-transition-remote-learning>.

<sup>10</sup> Executive Order No. 202.4 (signed March 16, 2020) ordered all schools in New York State until April 1. Executive Order No. 202.11 (signed March 26, 2020) extended the school closure until April 15. Executive Order No. 202.14 (signed April 7, 2020) extended the school closure until April 29. Executive Order No. 202.18 (signed April 16, 2020) extended the school closure until May 15. See <https://www.governor.ny.gov/executive-orders>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> New York City Department of Education, "Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza Announce Remote Learning for Remainder of 2019-2020 School Year," April 11, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/chancellor-s-message-for-families>.

## **REGIONAL ENRICHMENT CENTERS (RECs)**

With all New York City schools closed on March 16, as part of the City’s effort to ensure that essential frontline workers like medical personnel, transit workers and other key personnel can continue to report to work, on Monday, March 23, the DOE created regional enrichment centers (RECs).<sup>13</sup> RECs are staffed “by DOE employees and community-based organization partners, [and] provide children with three daily hot meals, remote learning time with their teachers, activities like art, music, and physical education, and social and emotional support.”<sup>14</sup>

Since opening March 23, the list of eligible workers whose children may enroll in a REC has expanded multiple times and includes more than 30 categories of workers including ferry workers, grocery store workers, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), pharmacy workers, utility workers and employees of many City agencies including fire, police, parks, corrections, homeless services, health, and others.<sup>15</sup>

To keep RECs safe, the DOE guidelines state that RECs are cleaned and disinfected daily, classrooms are limited to nine or fewer students, DOE nurses check the temperature of any person entering a REC, social distancing is maintained for all, and anyone who feels sick is directed to stay home.<sup>16</sup>

RECs will continue to operate through the summer months, so long as there is a gubernatorial executive order mandating that the City continue to provide childcare for children of essential workers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> New York City Department of Education, “Regional Enrichment Centers.” Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enrollment-help/regional-enrichment-centers>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> New York City Department of Education, “Regional Enrichment Centers.” Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enrollment-help/regional-enrichment-centers>.

<sup>17</sup> Information on file with Committee on Education staff.

## **DOE MEAL HUBS**

As part of the DOE's efforts to switch to remote learning, provide all-day safe environments for the children of New York City essential workers and continue to provide meals for students, the department launched Meal Hubs or *Grab & Go* sites as they have come to be known. Originally, the free meals were for all students in response to the closure of the New York City public school system on March 15.<sup>18</sup> Three meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) were initially offered to any student that showed up at one of the more than 400 meal hubs<sup>19</sup> across the city between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.<sup>20</sup> Students, or their parent/guardian could pick up the meals for the student, were permitted to take all three meals at once and identification was not required.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the worsening pandemic, on April 4, 2020, the DOE expanded the *Grab & Go* meals to include all New York City adults, with hubs operating for children and families from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and for adults from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.<sup>22</sup> While the times outlined above are to manage crowds, persons are permitted to pick up food at any time, and as before, identification is not required and three meals may be picked up at once.<sup>23</sup> Vegetarian and halal options are available at all sites too.<sup>24</sup> On Monday, April 20 and in the days that followed, the DOE also began offering kosher meals at select sites in all five boroughs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Chang, S., "Free Grab-And-Go Meals Now Available To Anyone In Need." *Gothamist*. April 4, 2020. Accessed at: <https://gothamist.com/food/free-grab-and-go-meals-now-available-anyone-need>.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* To find locations of the grab-and-go program, you can text "FOOD" or "COMIDA" to 877-877, call 311, or [check the map here](#).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> New York City Department of Education, "Free Meals." Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/food/free-meals>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> O'Connell-Domenech, A., "Kosher Grab-and-Go meals now offered at select schools in Brooklyn and Queens." *QNS.com*. Accessed at: <https://qns.com/story/2020/04/22/kosher-grab-and-go-meals-now-offered-at-select-schools-in-brooklyn-and-queens/>.

For those medically fragile students that are not able to visit a Meal Hub, the DOE has partnered with DoorDash to ensure these students have access to meals.<sup>26</sup> DoorDash is delivering breakfast, lunch, and dinner to medically fragile students.<sup>27</sup> The department is currently serving 123 students through this program and are working to ensure every medically fragile student is served.<sup>28</sup>

As of May 4, 2020, more than 8 million meals had been served to New York City residents by the DOE.<sup>29</sup>

## **REMOTE LEARNING**

On March 23, 2020, DOE transitioned to remote learning, which allows educators to deliver lessons virtually and students to complete assignments, projects and exams online. To support students with learning remotely, NYC public schools loaned 175,000 technology devices to their students,<sup>30</sup> and DOE Central implemented a plan to loan 300,000 internet-enabled iPads to public school students in need. To obtain an iPad, families were required to complete a Remote Learning Device Request form on DOE's website.<sup>31</sup> DOE's distribution prioritization list is as follows:

- Students in temporary housing and foster care
- High school students, beginning with students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students in public housing
- Elementary and middle school students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students in public housing, and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch or are in CSI/TSI schools

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<sup>26</sup> Information on file with Committee on Education staff.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> New York City Department of Education Elected Officials briefing call, May 4, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> New York City Department of Education, "iPad Distribution." Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/ipad-distribution>.

- All other elementary and middle school students.<sup>32</sup>

Despite DOE's plan, it took over a month for many students who requested iPads from the department to receive such devices. Moreover, the department established an April 23 deadline which guaranteed that all families who submitted a request for a device received it by April 30.<sup>33</sup> As reported by New York Pix 11 on May 19, 2020, the DOE shipped more than 289,000 internet-enabled devices to students and the Administration plans to continue to distribute the remaining devices as they are requested.<sup>34</sup> On April 27, the DOE also announced that iPads would be distributed to nonpublic school students who receive special education and related services from the City.<sup>35</sup>

To support remote educational instruction, the DOE developed student accounts in Google Classroom and Microsoft Office 365.<sup>36</sup> Recently, after first prohibiting its use due to student privacy concerns, the DOE partnered with Zoom to offer schools and students a free Zoom account.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the distribution of technology, during the week of March 29<sup>th</sup>, the department mailed activity packets to families for students in grades pre-K-5 which included 10-days' worth of lessons in different subject areas.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> Information on file with committee staff

<sup>34</sup> New York City Department of Education Testimony at NYC Council Education Executive Budget Oversight Hearing. Accessed at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4429895&GUID=E9ED5A91-2B52-4531-B29F-C6F19D4CF563&Options=Advanced&Search=>.

<sup>35</sup> TeachNYS, "Teach NYS Lauds New York City DOE Program to Offer Free iPads for Nonpublic School Students Receiving Special Education." Accessed at: <https://teachcoalition.org/nys/teach-nys-lauds-new-york-city-doe-program-offering-free-ipads-for-nonpublic-school-students-receiving-special-education/>.

<sup>36</sup> New York City Department of Education. "DOE Student Accounts." Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/technical-tools-and-support/doe-student-accounts>.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> New York City Department of Education, "iPad Distribution." Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/ipad-distribution>.



### *Remote Learning for Students with Disabilities and Multilingual Learners*

The DOE also instituted policies to help ensure that students with disabilities and multilingual learners were able to access material. NYC schools were required, pursuant to an executive order by Governor Cuomo, to develop a Special Education Remote Learning Plan for students with disabilities which set forth how special education and related services recommended on a student’s individualized education plan (IEP) would be provided through remote learning to continue to support students with achieving their IEP goals.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, schools were required to “make every effort” to ensure that students with IEPs continue to receive instruction from the same special education teacher and/or teacher teams and paraprofessionals that usually provide them with instruction.<sup>40</sup> Currently, related services are being provided through teletherapy (videoconferencing) “when possible and appropriate.”<sup>41</sup>

Schools were also required to develop a remote learning plan for English language learners and former English language learners to ensure that these students receive targeted instruction in English with the appropriate amount of assistance in the language they speak at home.<sup>42</sup>

### *Grading and Promotion*

On April 28, 2020, Chancellor Carranza and Chief Academic Officer Dr. Linda Chen announced the following grading policy for remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year:

- Grades 3K & Pre-K - No change because students do not receive report cards or grades.
- Grades K – 5<sup>th</sup> - Students receive final grades of either “Meets Standards” or “Needs Improvement”.

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<sup>39</sup> New York City Department of Education, “Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs),” March 22, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/chancellor-s-message-for-families>.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

- Grades 6th-8<sup>th</sup> - Students receive final grades of “Meets Standards”, “Needs Improvement”, or “Course in Progress”.
- Grades 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> - School’s existing grading scale applies, but no failing grade will be issued. A “Course in Progress” will be issued instead. After final grades have been issued, students and families have the option to convert any or all passing Spring Semester 2020 final grades to pass. Any course in progress grade will not be factored into a students’ GPA.<sup>43</sup>

Notably, the New York State Education Department canceled June and August Regents exams for students. To be exempt from taking the Regents exam and still receive credit towards graduation, students must be enrolled in the Regents related course, and pass the course.<sup>44</sup> The State also canceled grades 3-8 math and reading statewide exams.<sup>45</sup>

### *Summer School*

On May 19, 2020, the DOE sent families information about summer school programming, which will continue in remote form.<sup>46</sup> The dates announced for summer remote instruction were July 13 – August 18 for grades 3–8; July 13 – August 21 for grades 9–12; and July 1 – August 13 for students in all grades with 12-month IEPs.<sup>47</sup> On May 20, 2020 the DOE released the following updated summer school calendar:

- Elementary and middle school students - the program will start one week earlier and will run from **Monday, July 6 – Tuesday, August 11**. There is no change to the duration or structure of the program;
- High school students - courses will start one week earlier and will run from **Monday, July 6 – Friday, August 14**. There is no change to the duration or structure of this program and

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<sup>43</sup> ” Chancellor Carranza and Chief Academic Officer Linda Chen Announce the Grading Policy for Remote Learning,” May 15, 2020. Accessed at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/chancellor-s-message-for-families>.

<sup>44</sup> Reema Admin, ”State scraps August Regents exams amid uncertainty about reopening schools,” (Chalkbeat), April 30, 2020. Accessed at <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/30/21243466/state-scraps-august-regents-exams-amid-uncertainty-about-school-reopening>.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> New York City Department of Education, “Summer School 2020.” Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/summer-school-2020>.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

- Students with 12-month Individualized Education Plan (IEP) services - no change to the calendar. Our teachers start on Wednesday, July 1 and students are expected to participate from **Thursday, July 2–Thursday, August 13.**<sup>48</sup>

To determine who will be enrolled in summer school programming, the department outlined that for students in grades 3-8, those who are not promoted in June will be required to attend summer school.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, some students in grades 3–8 who are promoted in June may also be recommended by their teacher for additional academic support over the summer and participate in summer school.<sup>50</sup> High school students who “receive a grade of Course in Progress, or who need to retake a course they have failed in a prior term, will participate in remote instruction for the course(s) in which they need to earn credit.”<sup>51</sup> Finally, students in all grades with 12-month IEPs will also participate in summer school.<sup>52</sup> The department will continue to provide social-emotional learning activities on a daily basis and students enrolled in summer school will also have opportunities to go on self-paced virtual field trips.<sup>53</sup>

## **ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

Understandably, the emergency shift of more than 1 million students to remote learning due to COVID-19 created a host of problems, starting with a lack of preparation and training for teachers.<sup>54</sup> The Mayor announced on March 15, 2020 that schools would be closed effective March 16 and that teachers would report to schools for three days of professional development on remote

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<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Gomez, “It’s More Than Machines: The Emerging Concerns About NYC’s Online Learning,” *City Limits*, March 28, 2020. Accessed at: [https://citylimits.org/2020/03/28/its-more-than-machines-the-emerging-concerns-about-nycs-online-learning/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=cb\\_bureau\\_ny](https://citylimits.org/2020/03/28/its-more-than-machines-the-emerging-concerns-about-nycs-online-learning/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cb_bureau_ny).

learning from March 17-19 in preparation for the launch of remote learning for students on March 23.<sup>55</sup>

Further, the Mayor announced that only the first 25,000 iPads, out of the 300,000 ordered, would be distributed the week of March 23.<sup>56</sup> The remaining iPads were to be delivered on a staggered basis with new shipments arriving from Apple each week and then sent to IBM for “staging,” which means connecting them to the internet, adding all necessary applications, and enabling content filtering.<sup>57</sup> After being staged, the iPads are assigned to individual students and shipped to homes.<sup>58</sup> The DOE shared that Apple was the only company that would be able to turn around an order as large as this quickly, but regardless, it would still take time to get 300,000 devices delivered and ready for students.<sup>59</sup> While understandable, this process meant that the distribution of devices to students took many weeks, leaving many, primarily low-income students at a significant disadvantage and falling further behind their peers.<sup>60</sup>

A lack of timely access to internet-enabled devices is one of several issues that have triggered concerns that the coronavirus has exacerbated inequities in instruction and learning and widened the achievement gap for vulnerable students. Low-income students and families who have less experience with technology require more support to set up and participate in online learning, but such support is not always easily accessible.<sup>61</sup> Many families, especially low-income, may be

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<sup>55</sup> Office of the Mayor press release, “New York City to Close All School Buildings and Transition to Remote Learning,” March 15, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/151-20/new-york-city-close-all-school-buildings-transition-remote-learning>.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> Annalise Knudson, “240K devices for remote learning will be distributed to NYC students by end of April,” *SILive.com*, Apr 14, 2020, accessed at <https://www.silive.com/coronavirus/2020/04/240k-devices-for-remote-learning-will-be-distributed-to-nyc-students-by-end-of-april.html>.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> New York City Department of Education Elected Officials briefing call, May 4, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Zimmerman, A. and Gould, J., “5 weeks into online learning, NYC is still racing to get thousands of devices to students,” *Chalkbeat*, Apr 25, 2020. Accessed at: <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/25/21236279/students-lack-devices-nyc-schools-coronavirus>.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

dealing with issues such as job losses, food insecurity, and other stressors that impede their ability to fully participate in remote learning.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, COVID-19 has had a disparate impact on low-income communities of color in NYC,<sup>63</sup> thus black and Latinx students are more likely to suffer a negative impact on learning due to the trauma of losing a family member to the virus.

The approximately 200,000 NYC public school students with disabilities are also suffering learning loss during this pandemic.<sup>64</sup> As related services, like speech, occupational and physical therapy move to virtual, teletherapy sessions, without teachers, paraprofessionals or other skilled professionals on hand, “[p]arents have been forced to assume the roles of part-time special-service providers.”<sup>65</sup> Additionally, in recognition of difficulties resulting from a shift to remote learning, city, state and federal guidance have relaxed certain requirements to allow schools to provide what is required in a student’s IEP “to the greatest extent possible.”<sup>66</sup> For example, schools may reduce the amount of targeted help students receive from special education teachers, a service known as “Special Education Teacher Support Services,” or SETSS, such as small group instruction in specific subjects like reading or math.<sup>67</sup>

English language learners (ELLs), also known as multilingual learners (MLLs), normally face language barriers and other challenges resulting in a low graduation rate of 41% compared to the overall rate of 77% for students citywide last year.<sup>68</sup> The switch to remote learning has created

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<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> Sharon Lerner, “Coronavirus Numbers Reflect New York City’s Deep Economic Divide,” *The Intercept*, Apr 9, 2020. Accessed at: <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/09/nyc-coronavirus-deaths-race-economic-divide/>.

<sup>64</sup> Shapiro, E. and Harris, E., “This Is Schooling Now for 200,000 N.Y.C. Children in Special Education,” *New York Times*, Apr 29, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/nyregion/special-education-coronavirus-nyc.html?action=click&module=News&pgtype=Homepage>.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> Alex Zimmerman, “NYC gives the OK to shrink special education services amid coronavirus upheaval,” *Chalkbeat*, Apr 8, 2020. Accessed at: <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/8/21225484/nyc-gives-the-ok-to-shrink-special-education-services-amid-coronavirus-upheaval>.

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*

<sup>68</sup> Amin, R. and Basu, S., “For NYC students learning English, remote learning can come with steep barriers,” *Chalkbeat*, Apr 20, 2020. Accessed at: <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/20/21230497/for-nyc-students-learning-english-remote-learning-can-come-with-steep-barriers>.

additional hurdles for MLLs. In addition to difficulties with English literacy, low-income immigrant families often have problems with digital literacy, which is generally low in households that do not have devices and internet access.<sup>69</sup> Due to a shortage of bilingual teachers and staff, both tech support and communication regarding instruction and assignments in families' native language is in short supply.<sup>70</sup>

Difficulty with digital literacy is one, among many, concerns for students experiencing homelessness, also known as students in temporary housing (STH).<sup>71</sup> For many STH, schools provide “a source of stability in an otherwise unstable life” with predictable routines, connections to peers, and relationships with trusted adults who can offer much-needed emotional support.<sup>72</sup> Any disruption in learning, as occurred in the time between the closure of schools and when many STH received and were able to use an iPad, may have widened the achievement gap for these already academically-struggling students.<sup>73</sup> In addition, with respect to RECs, one noticeable and glaring omission from the list of eligibility is not a certain category of worker, but a vulnerable student population—students in temporary housing. Homeless shelters, hotels, transitional housing, shared housing, domestic violence shelters and other temporary housing situations that students may find themselves living in, do not provide an environment conducive for academic enrichment and learning. In addition, many of these students lack access to the internet. Remote learning is already challenging in a system with more than 1.1 million students. These students are only eligible if their parent falls into one of the employee categories outlined above as determined by the DOE.

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<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> ICPH Blog, “10 Things to Know about Homeless Students Amid the COVID-19 Crisis,” *Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness*, March 31, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.icphusa.org/blog/10-things-to-know-about-homeless-students-amid-the-covid-19-crisis/>.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

Other issues have affected a wide range of students. An example of this is DOE’s decision in April to ban the use of Zoom for online learning due to security and privacy concerns, even though many schools had been using it for weeks.<sup>74</sup> The sudden announcement, without detailed instructions on how to switch to other platforms, caused confusion and led some schools to halt live instruction, creating further disruption to and disengagement of students.<sup>75</sup> In early May, DOE announced that, after further discussions, they had reached an agreement with Zoom to incorporate data encryption and other settings to provide a safe, secure platform for students, and so would once again allow schools to use Zoom for remote learning.<sup>76</sup> This change, while welcomed by many, will likely lead to more disruption for students as schools again switch online learning platforms.

## **CONCLUSION**

At today’s hearing, the Committee on Education will hear from the DOE on its efforts to date in implementing remote learning, lessons learned and how the provision of remote learning can be improved before the start of summer school.

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<sup>74</sup> Zimmerman, A. and Veiga, C., “As NYC bans Zoom for online learning, some schools pause live instruction,” *Chalkbeat*, Apr 6, 2020. Accessed at: <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/6/21225440/as-nyc-bans-zoom-for-online-learning-some-schools-pause-live-instruction>.

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> New York City Department of Education, “Updates on Use of Zoom from Chancellor Carranza,” May 6, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learn-at-home/chancellor-s-message-for-families>.