



**TESTIMONY OF THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
PRESIDENT MICHAEL MULGREW**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**REGARDING REMOTE LEARNING:  
THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON THE CITY'S SCHOOLS**

**MAY 27, 2020**

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the more than 190,000 UFT members, I would like to thank Chairman Mark Treyger and all of the members of the council's committee on education for allowing me to share with you the experience of New York City educators and school personnel with remote learning during the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis as well as to provide you with some thoughts on how to safely reopen our public schools.

While our educators may not be physically present in classrooms, they continue to be an important presence in the lives of our students and their families. Our city's educators did the unthinkable, the unimaginable, something we thought was years away. In one week, our city's teachers moved our entire education system from the classroom to remote learning at home.

Some said it could not be done, but we rose to the occasion. It has not been perfect, but our educators have now built the foundation for all remote learning. It has been their ingenuity and dedication that showed us what education will look like in the new normal. Today, I say with pride that our city's teachers are better than ever, ready to tackle all of the challenges that lie ahead to ensure we provide the best education to our students.

## **Remote Learning in NYC during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Sunday, March 15, 2020, is a day to remember. Though we urged the city to close our schools before then, NYC finally decided to shutter schools. Teachers and school-based professionals spent the following week training on remote learning. Then, for the first time in our city's history, our members engaged students, from dining tables or basements, living room to living room, and resumed school.

Tens of thousands of teachers and school-related professionals are keeping learning alive for children. They now have first-hand knowledge of what works and, as important, what doesn't. UFT members created their own playbooks on how to remotely engage their students. From teaching the classics to evaluating a student to providing guidance, our members are doing it all.

I want to share with you examples of our educators' successful virtual classrooms.

- A Bronx high school film and English teacher created a "green room" in his apartment to help students work on their class film projects.
- A pre-kindergarten teacher on Staten Island arranged virtual playdates each Friday because her students craved playing with each other.
- Educators in Queens start each morning with a mental and physical yoga workout for autistic students, followed by their journal and writing work.
- A 4th-grade math teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, loves giving live lessons, especially when parents sit in. She has added one-on-one Google Meets for students who cannot make the appointed class times, often because a parent or sibling needs to use the household's sole computer, tablet or cell phone.
- The staff at a Manhattan transfer high school, which serves over-age, under-credited students, captured their teens' attention with a schoolwide program called "The

History of Me.” Students share and reflect on their experiences through the pandemic.

Educators have also stayed emotionally connected to students, doing whatever they can to help students and their families handle the pandemic.

- A middle school social studies teacher in Corona, Queens – a viral hot spot – collected donations from colleagues and arranged help from a local supermarket. After virtual school, she and her crew of volunteers buy food and staples and deliver them to more than 200 of her school’s families.
- A Bronx social worker answers his students’ calls, texts and emails until 3 in the morning. Often, they just need someone to talk to when they can’t stop crying.
- An elementary English-as-a-New-Language teacher in Brooklyn keeps teaching one of her students even though the family recently moved to Colorado during the pandemic. He couldn’t enroll there, so she and her school still work with the family.
- A Harlem math and science teacher strives to keep a dedicated student focused. The pandemic has forced the student’s extended family to double up so now one adult and seven children all share the same cramped quarters.

### **Hybrid Learning Model for 2020-2021 School Year**

Parents, possibly more than ever, understand the value of a teacher. Parents have learned during this unique time what goes into teaching — that it is a skill, a craft, a calling that requires endless reserves of empathy, creativity, patience and humor.

Our members now have experience in remote learning, and they also have the desire to expand their work for summer school and for when school starts in September. UFT officers have been holding working sessions on remote learning with educators across grade levels, subject matters and disciplines. Our front-line educators shared these thoughts with us:

- We launched distance learning with little planning — September 2020 cannot be a repeat of that.
- Come the 2020-2021 school year, some students will need make-up time, and many will need emotional support. One approach is to prioritize social-emotional support and feedback during in-person sessions. Perhaps, we can also use the in-person time to teach technology skills to students and families, so everyone has a better experience during remote learning sessions.
- Teachers want to retain flexibility in instruction and ways to engage students. They love live instruction — seeing their children, picking up on the non-verbal cues. However, some have reported the most vulnerable students are disproportionately unable to log in at specific times. Educators say they would like to keep a mix of live, small group, and individual instruction, as well as develop additional ways to post material so students can access it when they and/or their families have time.
- Students and parents have a better experience with streamlined platforms. The more students have to juggle multiple apps and platforms, the more time is lost.
- Educators report a deeper partnership between parents and teachers — one that needs to be maintained and nurtured when we return to school buildings.

This September, we are planning for all possibilities including a hybrid of in-person and remote learning. In addition to the union’s academic working sessions, the UFT is examining safety protocols in the buildings as well as other technology for use in schools.

On April 29, I wrote an op-ed in the Daily News — attached to this testimony — enumerating what we need to do to safely open schools in the fall. I mentioned the

challenges we need to think through as we consider what a school building looks like with social distancing.

The biggest challenge we face right now, however, concerns the state, city, and school budgets. We have to assure parents that their kids are walking into safe buildings. We have to assure our school personnel of that as well. We have to set up new protocols that inevitably come with new costs.

To get them through this crisis, New York City students, parents and educators need more resources, not fewer. We still don't have a school nurse in every school building, and I doubt any parent will gladly send their child to a school without a nurse these days. We still don't have a guidance counselor, social worker or school psychologist in every school.

All of it will take money. I am asking you to think big and provide our students with the same resources as when we bail out corporations or an industry

### **Focus on School Funding: Protect Direct Services to Students**

I understand that these are extraordinarily tough times and we may face financial challenges for years to come. However, we have to be strategic. Cuts to school budgets have been proposed for the upcoming school year, and we do not take this lightly. We are also concerned about the possibility of even more reductions due to a lack of support from the federal government.

In collaboration with our state and national affiliates, NYSUT and the AFT, and our New York congressional delegation, we want the education stabilization fund replenished and we want our state and local governments to receive funds to make up for the expected and significant budget gaps. I would argue that our advocacy has been successful. The U.S. House of Representative's HEROES Act includes \$90 billion for the education stabilization fund, \$500 billion for state governments, and \$375 billion for local governments.

We will continue to push the HEROES Act through the U.S. Senate and finally to the president's desk for signing. Just last week, we launched our "Pass the Federal HEROES Act" campaign because our schools need a lifeline. Through this campaign, we will leverage our relationships across other states to influence key U.S. senators. Our New York senators support this vital legislation, but we need to get more on board.

With these efforts in play, now is not the time to consider cutting school programs, especially mental health services. We need to protect FY21 school budgets. We need to protect programs that provide direct services to students.

### **UFT Programs Invest Directly in Students and Teachers**

I would also like to assure committee members that funds you commit to UFT programs go directly to students. All UFT programs are designed to eliminate barriers to learning and so are particularly well-suited toward overcoming the academic, emotional and financial challenges the COVID-19 crisis has created for our students and their families.

*United Community Schools seeks \$7 million in FY21:* Our UCS community school directors (CSDs) stepped up to the challenge created by the epidemic. They are making sure academic tutoring continues for students as well as the provision, albeit remotely, of spiritual wellness, counseling and therapy, and extracurricular activities, including music and sports. Some CSDs have created a parent chat so experts can directly speak to parents. Our UCS social workers have enhanced their role by observing virtual classrooms to identify struggling students, conducting outreach to find students who have not logged on to virtual classrooms and providing counseling to families who have been directly affected by COVID-19. UCS seeks to expand these direct services to students and school communities in the upcoming school year. Understanding the disproportionate effect COVID-19 has had on low-income communities, UCS schools will play a vital role in supporting these students and their families. We seek a significant expansion of mental health services by hiring more social workers, who have been instrumental in providing direct clinical support and programming at our UCS schools.

*Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC) seeks \$2 million in FY21—*PLC has played a critical role during the current crisis. Since remote learning began in March, PLC has conducted ongoing needs assessments for each of its 25 schools to provide the most needed interventions. PLC is providing virtual support to school leaders and

educators through restorative circles focusing on grief, loss and trauma so they can care for themselves and learn strategies to support students and families facing similar challenges. PLC has begun developing and sharing content via social media platforms in the areas of self-care, yoga/mindfulness and providing professional development for staff so they can help students when they return to school. Daily interactions with PLC on social media are in the tens of thousands. PLC plans to provide more support to school communities during the next school year. School staff will need a greater level of support to meet their own needs as well as the needs of the children and families they serve. PLC has the expertise to support schools in responding to the mental health needs of their communities.

*UFT Teacher Center seeks \$9 million in FY21:* The UFT Teacher Center, the union's signature professional development program, is playing a vital role in keeping NYC educators linked to each other and connected to their students during this period of remote learning. The Teacher Center staff is knowledgeable in both the technical aspects of distance learning and in online instructional material and virtual classroom support. At a time when most schools are shuttered, the Teacher Center staff is answering calls from teachers across the city who need help with their virtual classrooms and working with staff at individual Teacher Center sites to provide supports tailored to those schools' needs. The Teacher Center can help educators translate lessons built around personal interaction into an online format. They are also developing online professional learning around both remote learning tools and content. We thank the New York City Council for your first-time allocation last year. Next year, we would like to expand our program into additional schools including those in the Bronx Plan, to provide professional development on remote learning. Additionally, the Teacher Center is well suited to help educators align their classroom content to the state's new Next Generation Learning Standards.

*Teacher's Choice seeks to preserve \$20 million baseline:* Teachers buy everything for their students: pencils, notebooks, microscopes, geology kits, warm coats and food. Teacher's Choice, a City Council initiative, reimburses teachers for \$250 of those expenses. During the COVID-19 crisis, this program continues to prove its value. When our classrooms closed abruptly, many teachers left their schools without the supplies they needed to continue instruction. We want to thank you once again for baselining this program last year and urge you to maintain your strong advocacy for this program to ensure its preservation.

*BRAVE Mental Health Hotline seeks \$326,400 in FY21:* Our BRAVE mental health program continues to operate its free hotline and online chatting services, offering direct services to students and their families. We know many families are

experiencing grief, stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, loss of income and other problems that are exacerbated or were caused by the current crisis. Because of these new stresses, we reconfigured the program to provide students and families who contact BRAVE with information about programs that offer assistance. The UFT seeks to continue to combat bullying through BRAVE and to expand this vital program to provide students and families additional mental health support, which we anticipate, will be in high demand during the upcoming academic year.

*Dial-a-Teacher seeks \$350,000 in FY21:* After a brief pause to adjust to remote teaching, Dial-a-Teacher resumed its support service in April, focusing on language arts and math homework assistance for students in grades K-5. Thanks to our new online platform, students can chat with teachers about their homework questions. Students can, for example, take pictures of a question or draw out math problems and submit them to a Dial-a-Teacher staffer. We hope Dial-a-Teacher will soon offer all of its regular services in multiple languages and in all subject areas. The UFT would like to expand this program's online presence by enhancing the online app for students and procuring digital curriculum for multiple subject areas, in addition to updating our maintenance efforts. The current crisis has pushed us to expand remote teaching for all students; our Dial-a-Teacher program must follow suit.

### **Closing Thoughts**

These are extraordinary times. I know we are resilient, and we shall overcome by working together. We will never forget the 67 UFT in-service and 56 UFT retired members who have died so far because of COVID-19 or related complications. The union wants their families to know our thoughts are with them. We will continue to do what we can to offer support.

Attached: Mulgrew, Michael. (2020, April 29). The kind of testing schools really need: Better coronavirus screening is imperative if the nation's largest public school system is to reopen in the fall. *Daily News*.

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# **The kind of testing schools really need: Better coronavirus screening is imperative if the nation's largest public school system is to reopen in the fall**

**BY MICHAEL MULGREW**

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, APR 29, 2020, 5:00 AM

The federal government has now passed a stimulus package that includes \$25 billion to increase coronavirus testing and help reopen the nation's economy. This is the first step in what must be a sustained, coordinated effort by the federal government to provide the massive funding and kickstart the supply chains necessary for New York and other states to accomplish what needs to be done to amp up diagnostics and allow businesses and schools to reopen.

New York City has already paid a tremendous price in the pandemic, with more than 160,000 cases, and more than 12,500 deaths, according to the city Health Department. More than 50 UFT members have lost their lives during the pandemic.

New research suggests that the virus was present in New York much earlier than we first thought. We cannot know how differently the pandemic would have played out if schools and other public facilities had been closed earlier than they were. Logic would certainly suggest that better planning would have helped, in particular in the case of schools, which didn't introduce teacher training in remote instruction until mid-March.

But we do know that without committed federal partners, the price of coronavirus will continue to rise, because no state will be able to test and re-test hundreds of thousands of children and adults; to notify staff and students of potential viral exposures; to provide the personnel and supplies necessary for social distancing, screening and tracing; and to provide the materials needed for thorough cleaning and disinfecting of buildings where infections have emerged.

Some of the safety measures and protocols are already in place here, though at a much smaller scale than the massive efforts that will be necessary.

New York State already requires that incoming students have a certificate of vaccination against more than a dozen diseases, including polio, measles, mumps, hepatitis and other serious infections. The state could expand this requirement by insisting that all students and staff who are planning on attending school be tested in August for active or prior exposure to the coronavirus.

In September, medical personnel need to be available at every schoolhouse door to perform rapid temperature tests for all students and staff. Anyone with a temperature above 100.3 degrees Fahrenheit should be sent straight home, or directly to medical treatment.

Despite these precautions, since children carrying the virus may not show symptoms, it is possible that cases of the coronavirus may still emerge in the schools, where the concentration of students and staff makes it difficult if not impossible to practice effective social distance.

In such cases, the city needs to dramatically ramp up both its cleaning and disinfection protocols and the public notification procedures that are already mandated for other communicable diseases. The state will need the resources to aggressively trace those who came in contact with those who show symptoms.

Even these precautions may not be enough. Because schools have so many children in limited space, we may need to experiment with other options to adhere to social distancing, such as split schedules where students come in morning and afternoon shifts, or on alternate days.

While the buildings are closed, public school in New York is very much in session now. With only a few days of preparation and training, thousands of our members have managed to use technology to effectively engage children and their families in subjects ranging from reading and math to art and music.

My members are looking forward to seeing their students in person again. The state and the city have the time in the coming months to create a thoughtful, comprehensive plan to safely reopen school buildings and bring teachers and children back together.

Despite our members' eagerness to return to their classrooms, we are going to insist that no one — student, teacher or family member — should be back in school until protections like these are in place.

*Mulgrew is president of the city's United Federation of Teachers.*

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**Testimony of Jessica Caraballo of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

Thank you for hosting this hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Jessica Caraballo and I am a Program Director at Good Shepherd Services at M.S. 363 a middle school SONYC program in the Bronx.

Since the pandemic, we have moved our programming and supports remotely. Our staff have been working with families and leveraging our strong relationships to encourage students to remain engaged with their school work. We have created a series of remote activities that students could do from home including Salsa, Lyrical, Visual Arts and cooking classes. No profits across the City have stepped up to support families with remote learning, distributing laptops, assisting with google classrooms, and updating contact information (phone numbers, addresses, emails) so they can be reached by their teachers.

Students are dealing with complex trauma and now more than ever, we are helping them process the feeling of loss – of being away from family and friends, the outdoors, and the absence of activities they enjoy– while navigating remote learning. Our work is critical to the recovery of our young people.

At M.S 363 in the Bronx, it is important to name that our community has been plagued with gun violence, poverty, and health and economic disparities that have only been magnified by the COVID-19 virus. This on top of youth navigating remote learning and staying in doors. Our programs help children be children and ensure that they have a safe haven where they can escape community violence, drug/gang activity and other abuses they are experiencing. We are able to do this work because of the trust we have built with families and youth. As the weather is getting warmer and the announcement of summer programming being cancelled was made, our youth and families are feeling abandoned. While we continue to create remote activities to keep them engaged and off the streets, we know that our communities need assurances of what will happen this summer soon.

We know that if they are engaged at home, this keeps them off the streets and safe and this is when we know we gotten the job done!

Thank you for listening. I can take any questions now.



**Testimony of Jibal Ahmed of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

Thank you for hosting this hearing.

My name is Jibal Ahmed and I work for Good Shepherd Services as a Program Director for Beacon M.S. 45 in the Bronx. At our Beacon, we partner with over 750 community members in district 10 - about 600 of those who are under 21. Beacon programs are school-based community centers serving children age six and older, and adults. There are currently 91 Beacons located throughout the five boroughs of New York City operating in the afternoons and evenings, on weekends, and during school holidays and vacation periods, including the summer. Good Shepherd operates two Beacons – the Beacon at M.S. 45 in the Bronx and the Beacon at P.S. 15 in Brooklyn.

When DOE shifted to remote learning in March, we at the Beacons, shifted to remote programming and to support the host schools in identifying ways to increase attendance of students in the Google classrooms. We quickly coordinated a series of outreach efforts to contact families and identify students that would need additional supports. We provide support with school assignments, one on one supports, and have placed close attention to the needs of our immigrant families who have language barriers to complete assignments. In the Bronx, of the 160 students that are currently enrolled in the Beacon, we have actively engaged 110 students to date.

The Beacon staff have been regularly calling families to provide social and emotional supports. Our ability to be proactive and responsive to the needs of our students and

families comes from the strong bonds and relationships we have with them and the community. These relationships have been built over time. They trust us and they know we are here to support them. Beacon staff continue to connect families to local resources including food access. In the Bronx, we have helped our host school increase the number of families to complete DOE's laptop survey and we distributed 5 laptops. Staff at the Beacon have created a series of videos and power point lesson plans on the topics of art, dance, and fitness. We have shared these in google classroom which we update weekly. We communicate this content to our participants via personalized phone calls our staff make to families regularly.

Beacon staff are prepared to support youth over this summer but with funding being cut, we fear our families will be alone without the added supports we provide daily. When we reopen, nonprofits need to be part of the recovery so we can build back the community together.

Thank you for listening. Happy to answer any questions.



**Testimony of Jose Rivera of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

My name is Jose Rivera and I am a Community School Director with Good Shepherd Services at JHS 292 in East New York for past 3 years. My testimony will focus on how Community Schools are supporting communities in the Bronx and Brooklyn during this pandemic.

GSS is a Community School provider at six community schools across the Bronx and Brooklyn Boys & Girls HS (560), 297 (120), Bushwick (330), 292 (530), Bronx - 246 (700) and Clinton (1,000) – serving over 2,200 students.

Devices: Good Shepherd Services has distributed 65 computers to Special Ed and Refugee /Immigrant students from Bangladesh, Yemen, and Central and South America. These populations have historically been hard to reach by DOE whether because of the language barrier or for fear of sharing personal information with the authorities.

As the CSD, it is my role to connect students, families and school administration to resources. In East New York, our school has been collaborating with Good Shepherd Services' Single Stop, the Family Enrichment Center and the ENY Community Partnership Program for emergency food stamps, unemployment benefits, access to food pantries, and housing attorneys among other social services. At Boys and Girls HS, Good Shepherd hosts Wellness Wednesdays where staff call children and families to support their social and emotional needs. Since April 7th the Community School staff at P.S. 297 in Bed-Stuy have given out 900 food packages that supported over 3,000 individual community members. At Bushwick Leaders High School, we have been providing College Prep Sessions and Virtual College Tours to engage students around future planning.

Constant Contact: AT 292, our team regularly calls students to check in how they are doing with remote learning and home life. In the last two weeks of March, we made 250 phone calls and of

last week we have made 2,000 calls to our students and parents. Our work builds on the trusting and lasting relationships we have with our students and families.

We conducted a survey of 150 parents and found out that 43.33% of respondents are facing food insecurity or they can't afford to pay rent. 30% of participants shared they are experiencing anxiety, depression or emotional distress as a result of the pandemic. When asked rank the top 3 services they need, families responded as follows: Emergency Food Stamps (24%), Cash Assistance (21%) and Employment and Career Development (20%).

From the data and the phone calls, we know that families need CBO supports to navigate our new normal and remote learning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Good Shepherd remains committed to ensure student needs are met, that they have a conducive learning environment and that we provide the supports families need to ease the pain they have suffered during the pandemic.



**Testimony of Kris J. Greene of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

Kris J. Greene, Program Director, Good Shepherd Services at Brooklyn Scholars Charter School

My name is Kris Greene and I am a Program Director at Good Shepherd Services over both a COMPASS and SONYC afterschool program at Brooklyn Scholars Charter School in East New York. I would like to express the seemingly insurmountable obstacles our program families will potentially face this summer. This testimony provides input from Mrs. Roxanne Thomas, the school's principal.

We have learned that families in our school community are experiencing:

- food shortages;
- an increase in technological needs for laptops to meet the requirements for remote learning and;
- anxiety related to meeting Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines with limited access to personal protective equipment.

As a result, we have connected families to:

- food pantries across NYC;
- distributed laptops families can borrow until we school is back in session and;
- referrals to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) resources around mental health including NYC Well
- Distributed resource maps and contact information to resources provided by City agencies

Lastly, as it relates to remote learning supports, we are supporting our families during this hard time through regular communication between program staff and families. These calls are currently happening on a weekly basis via calls, text messages, emails and voice messages and where we share resources and make necessary referrals for families.

Our COMPASS and SONYC staff provide:

- live activities via Google Classroom on a daily basis including stretches and basic beginner dance steps to keep our youth active and moving and improve reflexes.
- activities to reinforce space awareness
- discussions on decision making and making choices
- Sports discussions about idolized athletes, how their style of play has affected the way they see themselves as sports practitioners, research on basketball techniques as well as study the history of sports
- Class offerings on Art, Drama, Dance, Puzzle-solving and Expression Through Music
- Do It Yourself (DIY) activities for families to try at home that encourage family engagement

All these activities have helped our families keep students engaged, better use the excess time at home to remain in good health and continue to be mentally stimulated. Parents and guardians have shared their appreciation for



services such as these since it has alleviated the pressure unfairly placed on them at a time when the expectation is for them to be part-time educators.

These activities support closing the widening learning gap being experienced by our young people especially during the summer season when services will be nonexistent. We are committed to serving the needs of our community and understand that this is a difficult time - we can assist in ensuring that families have what they need this summer to support the growth of youth.



**Testimony of Luis Fuentes of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

My name is Luis Fuentes and I am the Senior Program Director at Monterey Cornerstone Community Center in the Bronx. I have worked for Good Shepherd Services for 12 years and during that time, I have been a group leader, teen services coordinator and now a director.

Good Shepherd Services runs two Cornerstone programs - Monterey in the Bronx and the Miccio in Red Hook. Since 3/25/20, the Miccio has distributed over 2,000 and Monterey has distributed over 1,000 meals. On most days, we have also been able to distribute additional items including masks, bags of vegetables, art kits, hot meals among other items. This has made it possible by the partnership that GSS has in the community. In addition to being a grab and go location, the staff of our centers are supporting students and families with remote learning. This includes supporting teachers to engage students that attend our after school programs and that visit the centers.

During this crisis, our paramount concern has been reaching out to our 200 families and getting them much needed resources. We conducted weekly check ins and established a homework help line for our families. To date, our 80 elementary participants in grades K through 5th grade call staff to get homework help. Since the crisis, all elementary participants have called in at least once for homework help and resources.

When DOE operates remotely this summer, and the Mayor successfully eliminates summer programming, there will be a gap in supports for families. GSS wants to fill that gap. We routinely reach out to our 200 families and without supports this summer, they will be left without much needed resources.

The Chancellor stated that teachers will be trained on social emotional supports. He understands the value that nonprofits have been providing to students during this time. The Chancellor himself has said that kids need academic and social emotional supports. Please let us do that. Today we are providing that support not only through our check ins, but also through our Salsa Congress Initiative. As an agency we have begun producing dance videos for kids to practice at home. Our Master Dance Instructor Gary Adams has led the initiative and provided activities that strengthen children's skills and have allowed us to support children's hobbies in a fun and safe way. These activities have also provided an outlet for youth who have experienced trauma as a result of the pandemic. Salsa Congress allows kids to master complex salsa dance moves that increase their self-confidence as well as express their cultural heritage.

These remote classes have allowed children and families to participate in a fun activity that are building family connections. These videos have been posted on our agency website and on youtube. I think it is important to stress that learning comes in many forms. Studies have shown the importance of the arts on youth development and our Salsa Congress continues to reap the rewards of this knowledge.

This initiative is just one example of what GSS is capable of providing. We hope to continue this incentive as well as other through the summer but, recognize that funding is not available. The African mantra states it takes a village to raise a child. GSS is a member of that village and if we are not funded, our children and families will feel the void.



# The Citywide Council for District 75

Committee on Outreach/Committee on Busing & Safety/Ad-hoc Committee on Legislation

Grisel Cardona, Chair      Amy Ming Tsai, Chair

Debra Altman, Chair

Amy Ming Tsai, Co-Chair

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The Citywide Council for District 75, Committee on Outreach, hosted a public meeting, on the 11th of May, 2020, on the topic "Regression in Students with Disabilities." The committee convened a number of clinical providers to answer certain questions in response to identifying an overwhelming issue of District 75 students' intolerance to remote learning and related therapy platforms put in place by the NYC Department of Education due to Covid-19 school closures.

The Panelists for this meeting were all clinical providers, having extensive experience in treating the special needs population in their respective professions. Among the key opinions, conclusions and recommendations expressed by the panelists were:

- Remote learning and therapy-related services for students with disabilities are problematic and are not effective modalities to meet the needs of students with I/DD classifications;
- The rate of regression in the student disability population is significant and rapid; reversal of its affects are difficult and prolonged with the potential to have an "irreversible impact" on development as an adult;
- Expect significant, global regression in the absence of hands-on therapy interventions;
- Conduct mandatory re-evaluations of I/DD students upon re-opening of schools; re-establish a baseline and appropriate treatment plan and supports amendments to I.E.P's;
- Resumption of hands-on related services as soon as possible giving parents the choice of all of (1) school sites; (2) at-home; (3) private facilities;
- Existing CDC pandemic protocols that providers are currently operating under must be used to safely resume hands-on therapy modalities;
- There are no services available for those students that cannot tolerate remote, tele-therapy.

All panelist practitioners, by signing below, state the foregoing opinions, conclusions and recommendations are within a reasonable degree of certainty, within the professions of each of the panelists, with said attestation electronically recorded at the May 11, 2020 meeting.

## Gershon Ney

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GERSHON C. NEY, MD.  
*Diplomate, American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology*  
Ney Centers for Epilepsy Care and Sleep Medicine

## Mary Beth Sivak

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MARY BETH SIVAK, MA, PsyD, Clinical Psychology  
*Assistant Regional Senior Supervisor, Queens Mental Health*  
YAI Premiere Healthcare

## Vinod somareddy

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VINROD SOMAREDDY, PT, DPT  
*Director of Physical Therapy*  
Reddy-Care Physical and Occupational Therapy

## Rita Levey OTR/L

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RITA LEVEY, MS, OTR/L  
*Director of Occupational Therapy*  
Reddy-Care Physical and Occupational Therapy

## Jason Mohabir

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JASON MOHABIR, MS, CCC-SLP  
*Speech Language Pathologist*  
YAI Premiere Healthcare


Dated this 20thDay of May, 2020

Signature:   
Gershon Ney (May 20, 2020 13:59 EDT)  
Email: [neycenters@yahoo.com](mailto:neycenters@yahoo.com)

Signature:   
Vinod Somareddy (May 20, 2020 15:52 EDT)  
Email: [vinod@reddycare.net](mailto:vinod@reddycare.net)

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# final statement of panelist2


Final Audit Report


2020-05-20


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A Non-Profit  
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**Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council**

Friday, May 22, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. We would like to introduce ourselves as Allison Davis and Dena Isles, and we are the Executive Director and the Director of NYC Residencies and Special Populations, respectively, for Arts Horizons New York (AHNY) located in Harlem.

The mission of AHNY is to enhance the lives of people of all ages and abilities by creating equitable opportunities to engage in the arts. AHNY has impacted the lives of innumerable children and adults in schools, hospitals, senior centers, community centers, and other community-based settings through the power of the arts. We are committed to making the performing, visual, literary and media arts and artistic expression equitable and accessible to diverse people of all ages and abilities. Each year we serve approximately 130,000 students, teachers, artists, families, and seniors each year in the NYC metropolitan area.

Since mid-March, AHNY has experienced a significant loss of income and work due to COVID-19 restrictions. In an effort to maintain some of our existing programs and partnerships, we have developed and launched Arts Horizons Distance Learning with several pilot virtual programs at some of our partnering NYC DOE schools using Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding. Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city.

Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Further budget cuts to these critical departments would adversely impact our ability to sustain our organization, compensate our teaching artists and staff, and to continue our mission of providing high-quality arts education experiences in NYC. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first. Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Allison Davis in black ink.

**Allison Davis**  
*Executive Director, Arts Horizons*

Handwritten signature of Dena Isles in black ink.

**Dena Isles**  
*Program Director, Arts Horizons*



TESTIMONY FOR A HEARING ON:

**REMOTE LEARNING:  
THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)  
ON THE CITY'S SCHOOLS**

PRESENTED BEFORE:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
MARK TREYGER, CHAIR

PRESENTED BY:

ANDREW GERST  
STAFF ATTORNEY  
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.

May 29, 2020

**MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.**

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## I. Introduction

Mobilization for Justice is a nonprofit organization that has been providing free civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers for over five decades. This written testimony is submitted as a supplement to the live testimony provided by Staff Attorney Andrew Gerst at the City Council hearing on remote learning conducted on May 27, 2020.

Mobilization for Justice's mission is to achieve social justice, prioritizing the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised or have disabilities. We do this by providing direct civil legal assistance, conducting community education, engaging in policy advocacy, and bringing impact litigation.

Among many civil legal matters, Mobilization for Justice advocates on behalf of low-income students with disabilities. This advocacy includes representing students at Individualized Educational Program (IEP) meetings, filing due process complaints, securing independent educational evaluations for students, and obtaining appropriate school placements and supports. Our work expanded substantially in 2018, when Partnership for Children's Rights merged with Mobilization for Justice. We currently assist students across all five boroughs of the city. This work includes a medical-legal partnership with four hospitals in the New York City Health + Hospitals system: Kings County Hospital Center in Brooklyn; Harlem Hospital Center and Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan; and most recently, Lincoln Medical Center in the Bronx.

During the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, Mobilization for Justice's educational advocates have made extensive efforts to ensure students with disabilities receive their full IEP services via remote learning. In the course of doing so, our advocates have been troubled to learn of the many students who have not received their IEP-mandated related services. In addition to doing substantive follow-ups with current clients, our office spent weeks conducting a survey of the families of 33 students regarding implementation of IEP related services via remote learning.

These conversations revealed that nearly half of these students with disabilities were not receiving at least one IEP-mandated service at all, until Mobilization for Justice intervened. Examples of these IEP related services that students were not receiving include: speech-language therapy; counseling; occupational therapy; and physical therapy.

## II. Key Findings

Mobilization for Justice provides the following findings based on our conversations with families of 33 students with disabilities:

- 1. Nearly half (42%) of families reported that they had not received any sessions for one or more IEP-mandated related services.** Mobilization for Justice began reaching out to families specifically regarding related services problems in mid-April. At the time of these initial calls, forty-two percent of families reported that their child's school had not started providing services for one or more IEP related services.

Only after we intervened by contacting schools directly did many of these parents report that related services began. Often these services did not commence until late April or early May. This delay of more than a month after the initial COVID-19 closure of schools on March 16, created enormous difficulties for students with disabilities. As of May 28, at least one parent has reported that they are still unsure if all remote services are taking place.

Examples of services that students lacked include: occupational therapy; speech-language therapy; counseling; and orientation and mobility services. The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is required by law to provide these related services. In total, families of 14 out of 33 students reported missing one or more of these related services until we intervened.

- 2. Counseling has proven a particularly challenging IEP related service to provide.** A full one-third of families (33%) reported that they lacked access to IEP-mandated counseling. In total, 27 families reported that their child's IEP included counseling as a related service. However, nine of these families, or 33%, reported that counseling was not being offered until an attorney from Mobilization for Justice contacted the school directly or asked the parent to do so.
- 3. Nearly 20 percent of families reported difficulty in obtaining access to an iPad or remote learning device.** While many families were satisfied with their access to technology, a good number were not. Of the families of 33 students with whom we spoke, family members of six students stated that they had not received a device as of mid-April or late April, despite having requested one. A number of families reported that their children were forced to attempt to pursue academic coursework on smartphones.

In addition to our sample of 33 clients, conversations with other parents have suggested continued difficulties with obtaining iPads. At least one other family reported both that they lacked any access at all to other technology alternatives, and that the school failed to deliver hard-copy academic instructional materials at the start of the shut-down.

- 4. Some families also lack access to speech-language therapy.** While not nearly as severe as the lack of access to counseling, some families have not been able to obtain access to speech-language therapy. Of 19 families that reported speech-language therapy being an IEP-mandated service for their child, three reported that speech-language therapy was not taking place (15.7%).
- 5. Several schools reported that they did not have up-to-date contact information.** With respect to families of the 14 students that reported not receiving one or more IEP services, Mobilization for Justice provided advocacy by either reaching out to schools directly or counseling parents to do so. In at least 4 cases (28.6%), schools reported missing up-to-date contact information for families. Problems included: the school had an incorrect email address on file, the school was calling a non-preferred or out-of-date phone number, and similar problems.

### III. Recommendations

Mobilization for Justice provides the following recommendations based on our conversations with families regarding remote learning:

- 1. During “wellness checks,” ensure that a school administrator checks in with every family of a student with a disability specifically regarding IEP related services.** As discussed above, our survey revealed that families of nearly *half* of students with disabilities reported that one or more IEP-mandated service was not being provided. These services have included speech-language therapy, counseling, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Delivery of mandated counseling services has been particularly problematic. Thirty-three percent (33%) of families where a student had counseling included as an IEP related service reported initially that they had not received counseling at all. Most of these families later reported that counseling did not finally begin until late April or early May, more than a month after the school shut-down had begun. At least one parent has reported that as of May 28, they are still unsure if counseling is taking place.

During this week’s hearing, DOE representatives stated that “one hundred percent” of schools have been “advised” to conduct “wellness checks.” However, based on our experiences, schools may not be asking families the right questions, with respect to special education needs.

In at least some instances, a school did not even know a particular IEP service was not being provided. This lack of knowledge appears to have occurred due to miscommunications (or lack of communication) among service providers, family members, and school administrators. Moreover, even when a service was technically being provided, many other problems existed. For instance, some families reported that, due to some facet of their disability, their child did not react well to a particular platform (e.g., Google Hangouts), which significantly impacted their ability to meaningfully access or benefit from the service.

During wellness checks, school administrators could improve service delivery by, for example, running through a standard checklist of IEP-related questions for parents of students with disabilities. This standard checklist of questions to families of special education students might include:

- (1) Have you received your remote learning device?
- (2) Is your remote learning device working well?
- (3) Have you received your Special Education Remote Learning Plan?
- (4) Are all the related services (e.g., counseling, occupational therapy) on the IEP currently taking place once a week, twice a week, or more?
- (5) Are you experiencing any problems with special education instruction or related services?

Schools must adopt a more proactive stance to make sure all remote learning is going smoothly (and indeed that the remote learning—as well as service delivery—is taking place at all).

- 2. Ensure that school administrators check in with related services providers, not just parents.** The DOE reported that “wellness checks” consist of administrators calling

parents. However, the gaps in related services detailed above indicate that this approach has not met students' needs with respect to related services. Administrators should also check in with related services providers—i.e., the school's speech-language therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, etc.—to see how things are going. Specifically, administrators should ensure that: (1) the related service is being provided for each student with an IEP, and (2) the student is responding well to the related service. If the student is not responding well, the administrator should discuss possible alternatives or accommodations with the related service provider.

- 3. Hire more school counselors and social workers for summer 2020 and beyond.** In the sampling of cases we surveyed, counseling has by far proven to be the mandated related service least accessible to students with disabilities. Given the nature of counseling, which we understand to normally involve conversation about issues related to school or emotional health, we believe this related service in fact may lend itself to remote learning more easily than other related services. As discussed below, families of a full 33 percent of these students with disabilities reported that their child was not receiving their legally required counseling. Given the grave emotional challenges that COVID-19 has imposed, this related service remains particularly crucial for students with disabilities.

Only 170 additional social workers are slated to be hired for summer 2020, when enrollment is projected to increase. Given that more students may participate in summer school, and given that a larger percentage of students may require counseling due to COVID-19 issues, 170 new social workers may not be enough.

- 4. Prioritize students with IEPs during the “wellness checks” time period.** Because students with IEPs often have particularly complex learning needs, schools should prioritize calling these students before making calls to other students. This will allow schools maximum time to resolve an issue with related services providers.
- 5. Complete all “wellness checks” to students with IEPs within the first two weeks of the remote learning period.** As Chair Treyger noted during the hearing, some schools apparently did not conduct wellness checks until early May—nearly two months after DOE school buildings closed on March 16. A student with complex learning needs, especially related to counseling and socioemotional health, simply cannot wait months for a school to reach out.
- 6. Conduct at least one “wellness check” per month, at least for students with IEPs.** Given the ongoing challenges with remote learning and related services implementation, schools should continue to make wellness checks even after the initial contact. Many problems may arise during remote learning (e.g. service providers have to drop out, a family commitment changes the time when services can be provided, etc.). Moreover, the longer that a period of remote learning lasts, the more intense the needs of a student and family may become. Schools must continue to make wellness checks throughout the entire remote learning period, not just once.

7. **Ensure that schools have up-to-date contact information for parents and students alike.** Relatedly, at least four schools reported not being able to provide a related service due to an issue with respect to contact information. While some parents may change contact information frequently, making communication difficult, the obligation of ensuring communication is that of the school, not the parent. If DOE schools do not have up-to-date contact information for parents, school administrators must prioritize these cases (e.g. using snail-mail letters, reaching out to other emergency contacts/relatives), not give up on them. Given that remote learning may become more prevalent, schools should regularly check in with parents—perhaps once a quarter, at the time report cards are issued—to ensure all phone numbers and email addresses are up-to-date, for both students and parents alike. Administrators could also update this contact information during the “check-in” calls/wellness checks regarding remote learning described above.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Mobilization for Justice thanks the Committee on Education for holding this hearing. We are committed to helping the City address the enormous challenges of remote learning for students with disabilities. The many conversations we have had with school administrators, parents, and students about this topic have helped illuminate both the promise and the perils of remote learning, and we hope to work together with the City to make remote learning a better reality for all.

**TESTIMONY**

**Education Committee Hearing**

**May 27, 2020**

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**Ann Cook**

**Executive Director**

**New York Performance Standards Consortium**

**[www.performanceassessment.org](http://www.performanceassessment.org)**



Thank you Chairman Treyger for the opportunity to speak here today on remote learning.

I am Ann Cook, executive director of the NY Performance Standards Consortium, a coalition of 36 New York City public secondary schools that graduate students using a well-established system of performance-based assessment in lieu of Regents exams.

Why is it that the DOE has projected that more than 180,000 New York City students will need summer school this year? That's a more than **400** percent increase over last year's number of children needing summer school – not to get ahead... but “to catch up.”

Why did so many children fail to succeed at on-line learning? It's not only because of an equipment shortage, or the lack of access to a stable internet connection – ---though **both** could do with serious attention.

No, what we know now – after eight weeks of on-line instruction --- of google classroom, zoom meetings, and other remote learning strategies -- is that remote learning is simply no substitute for person-to-person teaching. Yes ... in the crisis caused by COVID-19, it may have been better than nothing...but it utterly failed thousands of children, and only partially served those who managed to show up enough to be counted.

Given this, isn't it fair to ask, at a time when the Mayor has proposed a future of fiscal austerity, by what logic should we be repeating what just failed? Does a centrally -managed on-line summer school – undertaken apparently without the benefit of social workers, guidance counsellors or teachers who are familiar with the children -- using the same instructional scenario that apparently failed – really justify the use of the DOE's limited funds?

Wouldn't it the dollars allocated for a trial run of a centrally controlled system to slide into remote learning in September, be better used for per session pay to teachers, social workers and counsellors, working in their school communities, to plan curriculum and figure out how to support children as they return, under new conditions, to real time school?

As exhausted home-schooling parents will tell anyone prepared to listen – what their kids miss most are the interactions with teachers and friends--- the social fabric of schools--- the learning that comes from being with peers with whom to exchange ideas and thoughts, and with grownups who can challenge, support, tease, and respond to them as human beings. It's impossible to calculate the loss of this sense of community -- one that has taken its toll on the social and emotional well-being of our children.

Observers have called attention to the disturbing consequences of social isolation and the pressures brought on by on-line expectations.. Pediatricians are noticing disturbing trends in the behavior of young children, while experts at NYU's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry cite a 337% increase in the number of crisis calls made in March alone. They tell us that our children face an unprecedented wave of stress and anxiety unlike anything New Yorkers have seen before.

So, while we may give well-deserved kudos to teachers who, against all odds, explored new ways to reach and teach their students, to the extent that students responded, what we're told over and over is that those success stories were built on pre-existing conditions --- that is, on already existing, strong, powerful relationships between students and their teachers and healthy communities where students could relate to and learn from one another.

Children depend on these in-school experiences and real life relationships with teachers and peers to become healthy human beings. Even the most progressive adaptation of remote learning cannot replace shared and engaged classroom interactions. That explains why so many Silicon Valley parents choose to send their children to schools like Waldorf that are built on relationships and active learning that do NOT rely heavily on technology. The absence of such relationships is why so many children failed to thrive during the lockdown.

In other words, more than ever before, our children need their schools, their teachers, their school counsellors, and their social workers. More, not less.

This is no time for an application of what political analyst Naomi Wolfe calls the 'shock doctrine' – the wholesale adoption of remote learning. We saw how this worked in New Orleans, where responses to Katrina resulted in the wholesale destruction of public schools and their replacement with a system of charters.

While some view remote learning as an opportunity to further standardize instruction and trim down a work force, first line responders (known in education as teachers) will tell you: even the most progressive adaptation of remote learning falls far short in replacing engaged and vibrant teaching and learning.

So I urge you: Do not assume that the road to fiscal solvency resides in turning over the education of our children to remote learning. Technology certainly has its place, but it must never replace schools as essential learning communities. Downgrading person-to-person contact will have serious consequences for our democracy.

New York City Council

Committee on Education

Hearing on Remote Learning: Impact of Coronavirus on The City's Schools

Wednesday May 27, 2020

Testimony

from

Literacy Partners

Presented

by

Anthony Tassi, CEO

[anthonyt@literacypartners.org](mailto:anthonyt@literacypartners.org)

347-940-2692

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairperson, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Anthony Tassi and I run Literacy Partners, an adult literacy program serving the parents of DOE students, with a focus on pre-K and the younger grades. When parents enroll in our programs, they make measurable gains in their functional literacy and language skills and, as a result of our emphasis on child development and parenting support, their young children tend to show more developmental progress than their peers in the same educational setting.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

I know that it is customary, and often routine, to begin one's testimony by appreciating the leadership of the Committee Chairperson. I have indulged in this rhetorical tradition many times over the years when testifying before the Council.

In this case, however, I do want to make a special and sincere mention of the leadership that you have shown during these extraordinary times, Mr. Chairperson. You have been on the street delivering food; you have been exercising oversight of the Department's response; you have been advocating for more forceful and effective measures to prevent, contain, and mitigate the effects of the epidemic; and you have not lost sight of the major equity issues plaguing our system and how they might be addressed on a practical level.

So, thank you for your leadership, Mr. Chairperson, in a moment when it is needed more than ever.

### **Literacy Partners & Remote Learning**

Literacy Partners enrolled about 800 parents last year, whose children attend a wide variety of schools and early childhood education programs in all five boroughs. When we saw the epidemic on the horizon in February and moving into the City in early March, we took decisive action to reorganize our program and staff internally and transition our educational services to an online, remote learning format.

Because of our small size, our level of preparedness, and our willingness to take decisive action, we were out of the gate quickly -- well before the schools were closed -- and were perhaps the first educational program to operate Zoom classes for low-income and immigrant parents.

We did many of the same things DOE and other education programs have done: we bought our students laptops, we've paid for their hotspots; we completely changed our

academic schedule; etc. Along the way, we experienced many of the challenges that our colleagues began to experience several weeks later.

However, we avoided many of the bigger headaches and disruptions that many educators faced by approaching the transition with a realistic mindset: we can't do everything we used to do; what is it that we can do now in this current format that will have the most immediate benefit and longest lasting impact? Of all the family needs in front of us, which do we actually have capacity to address in a meaningful way?

The result are three program offerings for immigrant and low-income parents of young children:

1. English for Parents Classes
2. College Transition Seminars for Teenage Mothers
3. Parent Education Workshops for Spanish-Speaking Parents and Caregivers

### **Lessons Learned from Our Remote Learning Programs**

There are three important lessons that I would like to share with the Committee as it assesses remote learning policies and practices.

**The first lesson** is that the COVID-19 Recovery phase coming up is an ideal time to systematically boost the skills of parents and caregivers in ways that are highly effective and immediately relevant to their role in helping their child succeed in school. And the solutions to this challenge are easy to scale and relatively cost-effective -- Literacy Partners is doing this work right now and other organizations can replicate our efforts.

Our work with Spanish-speaking parents prior to Covid-19 included a series of in-person workshops in collaboration with UPK sites, Head Start programs, and other community based programs featuring video content we produced jointly with Univision. The program was evaluated by children's literacy expert and professor at New York University, Dr. Susan Neuman, who found the program "uniquely effective in comparison to other parenting programs" in boosting parents' skills in promoting children's early literacy and language skills and promoting bilingualism.

After we transitioned these community-based family engagement workshops to Zoom, we continued to see meaningful results for Latinx immigrant families. But, now we began seeing results that were particularly relevant to the challenges of remote learning in the COVID-19 era including parents increasing their confidence and frequency using online resources to help their children with remote learning.

## Key Results for Literacy Partners Zoom Workshops for Latinx Families

<b>% of Parents Who...</b>	<b>Total</b>
Increased Frequency of Reading Books With Children	47%
Increased Their Confidence Using Books With Children	63%
Can List 3 Language Rich Parent-Child Activities	76%
Implemented 2 or More Strategies They Learned in Workshops	94%
Increased Frequency of Using <b>Online Books</b> to Read With Children	61%
Increased Confidence Finding and Using <b>Online Resources</b> With Children	53%
Increased <b>Confidence Using Online Educational Platforms Themselves</b>	54%
Increased Confidence <b>Helping Children With Remote School</b>	53%

**The second lesson** is that policymakers and Department of Education officials should remember in the evolution of remote learning the primary role of the parent, guardian, or primary caregiver in the process of children learning remotely. Parents and caregivers need to be at the center of remote-learning policies and procedures.

Family engagement can no longer be a “nice to have” or a “should do” -- it is foundational to the educational success of K-12 students. Family engagement with tangible skills-enhancing, confidence-boosting, and community-building elements like our Zoom workshops are the best hope we have to prevent even more serious educational inequities from plaguing our system as the pandemic continues and after it is lifted.

**The third lesson** is that there are cost-effective, scalable solutions to engage Spanish-speaking families and we should invest in them right away so the communities hardest hit by the pandemic and mass unemployment are those that we prioritize.

**Conclusion**

I know that most everyone at the Department of Education is trying their best. Certainly the teachers and school staff at my daughter's public school in Brooklyn are giving this everything they've got.

But, DOE officials and policymakers alike must ask the practical questions in relation to remote learning going forward: what are the tangible needs that we see before us and who are the major assets in the lives of school children who can help them thrive?

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you today.

Good afternoon, and thank you for having me. I hope everyone's loved ones are healthy and safe through this difficult time. My name is Arthur Samuels, and I am the Executive Director of MESA Charter High School in Bushwick. We are a community-based school in our seventh year. We currently serve 480 students in grades 9-12.

The challenges to our community boggle the mind. While we have loaned out over 160 laptops, many of our students still lack the technology or internet access necessary to regularly complete assignments. A large portion of our families either have lost income or are essential workers who risk their lives every day to continue to put food on the table. Most tragically, seven MESA students or alumni have lost their parents to COVID. The scope of the devastation is hard to fathom.

Based on our experience trying to navigate this challenge, I want to share what I believe we will need if we are to continue educating our students.

- 1) *As much in person instruction as we can safely provide.* We know that everyone--parents, students, teachers, administrators--are working as hard as they can to support the switch to remote instruction. But it is no substitute for being in the building. Even leaving aside for a moment the myriad technology and access issues, it is simply not the same as being in a classroom with a teacher and your peers. Our students are social creatures and they thrive on that interaction. And whatever success we've been able to have with online instruction only works because it is built on a foundation of relationships that were forged in person. This will not work at all if we go into the fall and need to teach students online whom we've never laid physical eyes on. We need to do everything possible to keep our buildings and our city safe and clean so that we can teach in person.
- 2) *In 2020, internet access needs to be a basic utility.* If we are going to have to move to remote learning at some point in the 2020-2021 school year, everyone needs to have internet access. It needs to be thought of the same way as electricity and running water. This is not a luxury. It's a necessity for communication.
- 3) *Educators must make sure that, no matter what is going on, we are still teaching and kids still know it's important.* One of the hardest decisions we had to make at MESA was how to grade our students. We knew that some of them were dealing with unbelievable hardships at home. At the same time, we also knew that their education still mattered, and for many of them, they were still able to access our classes. We devised a grading system that accounted for both, supporting students who had challenges because of the crisis but also holding them all accountable to their work. We owe it to our parents and students to ensure that every day they are being given as much live instruction as possible (if not in person, than via livestream teaching, not pre-recorded videos), and hold them accountable for their learning. We will lose a generation if we do otherwise. My co-founder and I wrote more about this, [linked here](#).



4) *Mental Health Support.* When we return to school, however that looks, our kids and teachers will have suffered enormous trauma. Even those who escape comparatively unscathed--economically secure and not having lost anyone close--will still be traumatized. We will need to support them.

Lastly, I know that the Council is considering a resolution opposing the reissuance of the so-called "zombie" charters. MESA is one of the schools that would be blocked from opening if the state legislature were to follow the recommendations of the resolution.

The structural inequalities that exist in this city have been laid bare by the pandemic. While the neighborhoods hardest hit have all been those home to lower-income people of color, the most affluent New Yorkers fled the city. At a time when our citizens who have the least have suffered the most, I ask the Council and the state legislature not to deny them further the right to choose the best school for their children.

Thank you so much, and please stay safe.



**Ashley Jones**  
**Program Director at PS 92 Q Arts and Literacy Program**  
**by the Coalition For Hispanic Family Services**  
**Testimony for New York City Council's Education Committee**  
**May 27<sup>th</sup> 2020**

Thank you to Chair Treyger and the Education Committee and the entire City Council for the opportunity to present testimony today regarding Remote Learning in CBO Youth Development Programs / Remote Summer Youth Development. My name is Ashley Jones and I work for The Coalition of Hispanic Family Service's Arts and Literacy Program as an On Site Program Director at PS 92 Q in Corona Queens.

For over two decades, Coalition for Hispanic Family Services summer programs have served communities throughout Brooklyn and Queens, by providing safe, structured, creative programming for over 2500 youth, many of whom are among our City's most vulnerable.

The Arts and Literacy Program was founded to build literacy through the arts during the school year and summer and during the Pandemic has helped children and families remain connected and continue developing their voices and crucial life and social emotional skills throughout the Shelter In Place order through live virtual arts classes, tutoring, art therapy, counseling and more.

During any other 'normal' school year we are a much needed resource for many families to acquire social services and child care but since our city was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have become a lifeline for so many students and families.

We created a successful and thriving Remote Afterschool Learning Platform that is serving over 550 students weekly across our elementary and middle school programs.

As we called, connected with and surveyed our program families in those very scary and confusing first days of the shelter in place order we learned that while many of our families were worried about their jobs and paying rent, the number one concern for them was their children's wellbeing.



**Ashley Jones**  
**Program Director at PS 92 Q Arts and Literacy Program**  
**by the Coalition For Hispanic Family Services**  
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How would they learn? What would their days look like? How would they keep them safe? So we connected to resources from around the city and world to build a safe learning and creative space to bridge the gap.

We created a haven-a way for our kids to be able to... be. In an uncertain world, at an uncertain time we have given those students familiar faces, time to see and interact with their school friends, consistent classrooms, even if they are in tiny boxes on an LED lit screen, and avid advocates who have walked alongside them and their families to help get internet as they've had no internet because their household could never afford it or translated instructions for days of missed homework assignments that a family was struggling with because they didn't understand the ask or were not able to even read it or helped troubleshoot a login problem that was keeping a child from accessing their Google Classroom or called and searched through lists of food pantries to help find one that could help provide a family with food or send breakdowns and walk a single mother through filing for unemployment for the first time.

We've happily served our families in these ways and so many more while also checking math problems, sharing screens in a Zoom to communally color and create artwork on the whiteboard, teaching Clave rhythms and history bits of Afro-Cuban music, designing original beats on Garageband, looking silly while promising to do the latest Tik Tok dance craze as a motivator to get the kids out of their seats and even reciting a little William Shakespeare.

We have been a sturdy bridge from families to their schools and vice versa. We have been there.

And now, with major budget cuts falling on the Department of Youth & Community Development and DOE and Department of Cultural Affairs, we will not be there. We will not be there to give a child a virtual high five when they're feeling down because they haven't been able to leave their house, or to encourage a child and their family who is in the same room all day ,during an online class, to stop what they're doing and have a 3 minute dance party break to stay healthy or to be a liaison as a wonderful



**Ashley Jones**  
**Program Director at PS 92 Q Arts and Literacy Program**  
**by the Coalition For Hispanic Family Services**  
**Testimony for New York City Council's Education Committee**  
**May 27<sup>th</sup> 2020**

local restaurant donates free pizza kits for a family to give them a much needed free meal, an activity to take their mind off of the unknown and a little dignity.

We won't be able to be there and where will that leave those children? Those vulnerable children. Where will that leave those families? New York City students will be walking into a brand new school year that will be unlike any other and as it has been stated by our Mayor again and again, will have to be the best year our school system has ever seen. How can our students and families do that if we don't set them up for it?

If we deprive families and students of this bridge, they will not walk into the school year ready to face a changed system. They will be left behind. And the attempt to regain that footing will prove, for many, to be insurmountable. This is especially true of the communities that our program and so many like ours serve.

Youth programming and development as we have all learned in a very fast crash course over the last two and half months comes in all shapes and sizes and can be molded to both serve our children and families AND keep them safe and healthy and foster a comprehensive state of wellbeing. That is so important right now and will prove to be even more so in the coming months and years as we manage the long term effects of the impact of Covid-19 on our city's children.

So on behalf of myself and the CHFS's Youth Development programs, I implore you to restore funding for DYCD, DOE, DCA Summer programming. The young people of our city are the future. They will become the changemakers, the pillars of the community, the gears of our economy and the beacons of culture. We must do all we can to provide them with the services they NEED to continue to grow and learn and become.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony,

Ashley Jones



**Ashley Jones**  
**Program Director at PS 92 Q Arts and Literacy Program**  
**by the Coalition For Hispanic Family Services**  
**Testimony for New York City Council's Education Committee**  
**May 27<sup>th</sup> 2020**



The Coalition  
of Community  
Charter Schools

35-59 81st Street • Jackson Heights, NY 11372  
[www.c3s.nyc](http://www.c3s.nyc)

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE COALITION OF COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOLS  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION OVERSIGHT HEARING  
REMOTE LEARNING: THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON THE CITY  
SCHOOLS  
MAY 27, 2020

The Coalition of Community Charter Schools (C3S) is a group of public charter schools and organizations in New York City that envision a positive and collaborative role for charter schooling as part of our public education system. Located in all five boroughs, serving students of all grade levels with varying needs, and implementing a range of instructional and organizational models, community charter schools aim to exemplify the diversity, innovation, quality, and commitment-to-community that inspired the original vision of the public charter school movement.

Community charter schools represent the majority of charter schools, both in New York and nationally. They serve neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant, Elmhurst, Washington Heights and the South Bronx that are facing the acute devastation of COVID-19. We are keenly aware of the impact that this virus has, and will continue to have, on our children and their families. Community charter schools across the city have students that have lost family members, and parents and guardians that have lost jobs due to the coronavirus. Like so many students across the city, the children in our care seek safety, guidance and nutritious meals when they enter our school buildings. The sudden and indefinite nature of the closing of our doors has thrown the lives of our students, their families, our faculty and staff into disarray. Since that day, our school leaders have been working feverishly to keep their school communities intact through remote learning and constant outreach to their students and families. We are proud of the work that they have been able to do in spite of the challenges that they face and would like to share some of our observations.

As it was becoming clear that New York City public schools were going to close due to COVID-19, school leaders in community charter schools sprung into action by preparing ways they could accommodate remote learning. One of the many virtues of being an independent charter school is the ability to be nimble and not have to wait for authority from a centralized office to take certain actions. This allowed the leaders of community charter schools from across the city to tailor lesson plans, outreach strategies and other remote learning policies to their specific education philosophies and student populations. Whether a community charter school serves special needs students, over-aged and under-credited students, has a STEM emphasis or a



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vocational training program, all of the decisions are made at the school site and we believe that this flexibility allowed these schools to better prepare for, and implement, remote learning.

While the flexibility afforded to charter schools has helped our community schools prepare for this crisis, they still needed to overcome a lack of resources. Contrary to popular belief, most charter schools are not swimming in philanthropic dollars that can be tapped into at any time. This is particularly true of community charter schools, many of which have grown from the grassroots of their surrounding neighborhoods and struggle to raise outside funds – just like the PTAs of their local traditional public schools. When you couple this dearth of outside resources with the lower-than-traditional-public-schools per pupil funding that charter schools receive, you can appreciate the yeoman’s work that our community charter schools had to perform in order to get remote learning up and running. Additionally, while charter schools were able to access internet devices from the New York City Department of Education for their students with special needs, most charter school students were not eligible for these devices and community charter schools had to scramble – with their limited resources – to obtain devices for their students. With the prospect of some form of remote learning continuing into the upcoming school year, C3S is very concerned about the limited resources available to community charter schools, particularly in light of the elimination from this current fiscal year’s state budget of supplemental funding for charter schools and the prospect of looming budget cuts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Coalition of Community Charter Schools respectfully requests that the City Council and the DOE work to find ways to treat all students – whether they are enrolled in charter, traditional public or nonpublic schools - equally during this time of statewide emergency. Such a level playing field would include ensuring that all schools have access to any personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizers, cleaning solutions, etc. that might be mandated by NYSED to resume building operations at no additional cost to the schools. It would also include access to internet enabled devices, and any necessary support, for all children who need them if remote learning continues into the fall. Additionally, while the herculean efforts of everyone involved has made remote learning a very positive force for all of the city's students, most would agree that summer school is going to be vital for our students who struggle the most. Therefore, C3S requests that charter school student have equal access to the DOE's summer school programs. Finally, we’ve always believed that every school should have a school nurse, and that belief has been amplified by the effects of this pandemic. In order to keep all of us safe there must be a nurse in every school, regardless if it is a charter, traditional public, or nonpublic school.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Mayor Bill de Blasio and NYC Council,

The budget you have proposed amidst this generation's largest health and economic crisis is shameful and will result in the deaths and suffering of vulnerable New Yorkers. You have chosen to re-invest in the machinery of state violence which is ITSELF a public health crisis and in turn, made cuts to education, social services, and public housing which are essential to building strong and healthy communities.

I wish I could scream into this letter, the anger and pain I feel as the city once again prioritizes policing, prosecution, and prisons over health care, education, housing, and social services. The \$billions in cuts will be a weight on poor, Black, and brown New Yorkers.

Your budget is a blueprint for a police state. It is evident the city plans to respond to the health crisis, to mass unemployment and homelessness with criminalization and incarceration. This is a war-driven austerity budget against poor, Black and brown New Yorkers.

The only way to build strong, healthy, and safe communities is to DIVEST from police, prosecution, and prisons and INVEST in social services, housing, education, mental health care, and options for addressing interpersonal harm. Defund the DAs, defund the NYPD, close Rikers, and terminate all plans to construct new jails.

Caren Holmes



May 27, 2020

**Ascend Public Charter Schools**

Public Testimony, Submitted to the City Council Committee on Education

*Remote Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus on the City's Schools*

On behalf of Ascend Public Charter Schools, we, Brandon Sorlie (Chief Schools Officer) and Carl-Anthony Watson (Chief Operating Officer) submit this testimony to share our school communities' experiences and successes with remote learning.

Ascend Public Charter Schools serve 5,500 students across 15 schools in Brooklyn. We equip our students with the knowledge, confidence, and character to succeed in college and beyond. More broadly, Ascend is mission-driven in our aim to develop a scalable solution to the underachievement of economically disadvantaged children. Our network of urban, college-preparatory, K-12 public charter schools, operates with widely available financial resources, and post achievement levels equal or superior to schools educating students from middle-class families.



Our distinctly Ascend culture is centered on an ambitious liberal arts curriculum that promotes a warm and joyful culture through the use of Responsive Classroom and restorative practices. And our schools are *truly public*. We educate all students, engage all families, and backfill vacated seats through grade 9. Under this model, we've proved successful. Since 2015, Ascend has grown 35 percentage points in ELA and 40 percentage points in math in proficiency on State exams. Just last year, we celebrated the graduation of our first class of high school seniors with a 97% graduation rate. 100% of those graduating was accepted to college.

Like all New York City schools, we experienced certain expected challenges with the near overnight transition to remote learning. As the COVID-19 pandemic swept over the City, however, Ascend quickly sprang into action to support students and faculty in moving fully online.

We've had active engagement across all of our schools, and our teachers are working hard to keep students engaged every day. Schools are holding weekly community meetings to supplement regular class meetings, and teachers are connecting with students individually on a regular basis. Our teachers continue to arrive at professional

development meetings ready to do the hard work of intellectual preparation for creating and teaching their lessons.

We've surveyed our parents to better gauge how they are experiencing remote learning – some of the praise we received in response includes:

*"I love what the school is doing. In comparison to other schools, [our school] **seems to be a pioneer** in remote learning. You all are really doing such a great job."*

*"I really love this structure...I **really appreciate her teachers** and the way that they are engaging with [my child]. I am happy with how quickly you guys were able to do it, and how excellent it is - it is truly great. Maybe when we go back to school - maybe we can keep this platform for the assignments, I really love it."*

*"It deserves to be said - the turnover, how quickly you were able to put something together so structured, the video content and how much work goes in, and the content being presented by each teacher—**it's commendable, and everything is there to help the kids grasp the material.** You all found innovative ways to make it fun for [my child]. I appreciate that. Nothing negative, all positive. Overall, nothing but a good experience. If it continues the way it is, it will be beneficial for everyone."*

*"I have to commend you guys and let you guys know **I did take some of your ideas and pass them on to other schools that were struggling.** The comments on [my child's] assignments mean a lot to him, as do the check-ins and communication from teachers." "The remote learning helps me learn too!"*

\* \* \*

Ascend has made remarkable strides closing the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged students and students of color in Central Brooklyn. But today we face a challenge that will have far-reaching impacts on our students and families, and we must rise to the occasion to ensure our students remain on the path to success—and to avoid a reversal of the progress we've made and a resurgence of the debilitating gap in education our communities face.

Even as we navigate this period of uncertainty, we are preparing for what might be the new reality of schooling starting fall 2020. Indications from the CDC are that we should plan for a fully virtual start or, at the least, a model that has some degree of staff and students working and learning from home and some in-person at our buildings. We retain the health and safety of our staff and students as our key priority.

Though we successfully pivoted to remote learning, as described above, the resources needed to shift back into our buildings while the pandemic continues to impact our world are insurmountable. All signals suggest that we will face budget cuts. However, the demands for PPE and social distancing facilities elements are essential. At Ascend, our core value of growth reads, "We welcome feedback, hunger for new ideas, and

seek to expand our capacities.” Therefore, we are grateful for this opportunity to submit this testimony to the Council Education Committee. We see our elected officials as partners in our joint mission to provide an excellent education to our students. Our aim is for our experiences to spark new ideas and a commitment to supporting all schools in expanding our capacities as we meet the needs of our staff, students, and families in this new reality.

Brandon Sorlie, Chief Schools Officer

Carl-Anthony Watson, Ed.D., Chief Operating Officer

My name is Carolyn Eanes. I'm an English teacher at Rachel Carson High School in Coney Island, Brooklyn. I'm a member of Teachers Unite, an organization of New York City public school educators working to dismantle the school to prison pipeline.

Teaching through this pandemic has laid bare the impact of trauma on our young people and communities. Even before this, our schools were under-resourced. For example, this is my fourth year at my school, and just a few MONTHS ago we got our first PART-TIME social worker. Part-time. As we come out of this pandemic, our school communities will need even more support: financially, emotionally, and instructionally. As schools reopen, we will need more social workers, more trauma counselors, more support for educators, youth, and families who have been traumatized by this pandemic.

As an educator, I am seeing firsthand the PEOPLE who will be harmed by these catastrophic proposed budget cuts. It is unconscionable that our mayor can propose such significant cuts to our educational system, while leaving the NYPD and school security apparatus intact.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 19, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Penny Swift, and I am the Chief Executive of Education Through Music.

Headquartered in Midtown Manhattan, Education Through Music is a registered DOE arts services vendor, providing music education in schools all over New York City. Many members will be familiar with our organization, perhaps having stopped by an elementary school music class, a middle school band rehearsal, or even participated in a ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of a new music tech lab. We are humbled that so many of our representatives have been supportive of bringing arts education to the children of our city, and I write to you today to ask that you continue this support.

For those not yet acquainted, Education Through Music partners with under-resourced schools to provide music as a core subject for all children. We currently maintain 70 partnerships with elementary, middle, and K-8 schools located across all five boroughs, and our music teachers provide weekly in-school music lessons to nearly 36,000 students. Of these students, 94% are people of color; 83% qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch; 20% have special needs; 15% are English Language Learners, and 11% are experiencing homelessness.

Our program offers a low-cost means by which city schools can provide high-quality, comprehensive and sequential music education to their students. While our staff have decades of experience in designing, launching, and delivering a State standards-based music program, it is our partner school principals who know the individual student needs of their students. Together we work on a fully customized, school-specific curriculum, performance schedule, and ensemble options, and when the program is ready to go, it is implemented with the full support of the school community. Schools provide an annual contribution to ETM which is negotiated based on the level of support we provide. Not only does the contribution fee help to keep the program running (in fact, 38% of our revenue comes from partner school fees), it also ensures that Education Through Music and our partner schools remain exactly that - partners. For most schools, this money is allocated through the Fair Student Funding Formula, which, as you know, is currently facing a \$100 million cut.

While we appreciate that balancing a budget during a time of crisis is a daunting task, our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of

Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future.

Education Through Music teachers are currently delivering music lessons to students via Google Classrooms, and have been working closely with school administrators to overcome temporary accessibility issues, including developing offline resources for students who need them. For 2020-21, we had initially sought to expand our program to 75 partner schools, a growth rate which is consistent with our strategic plan. Given the current situation we now seek to maintain a total number of partners as close to 70 as possible, with a tacit understanding that there will likely be a reduction in partnerships should these cuts happen, which in turn will impact the number of students served. We know that these cuts will have a devastating impact on the budgets of our partner schools - schools who are still playing catch-up from the last recession, schools who serve students with the greatest need, students who deserve so much and yet are most likely to suffer from these cuts.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Penny Swift

**New York City Council Education Committee Hearing**  
**May 27, 2020**  
**Written Testimony by Chien Kwok**

My name is Chien Kwok. I am a parent of two public school children, PTA co President, member of PLACE NYC & graduate of Brooklyn Tech. My comments are my own.

**Scarcity, Waste & Corruption**

In the nation's most costly education system with a \$34BN budget that yet has a profound scarcity of resources for our children, there is unfettered waste and corruption that has robbed all our children of their future. All these have been exposed and worsened by COVID-19. We don't have the same funds anymore but need to help our children overcome even greater challenges.

The screen school admissions debate is rooted in shortage of programs that support all types of students. Every school needs an academically rigorous program for high performing students as much as special education for students with disabilities, regardless of race, income level or other factors. No child should commute long distances to access a sound and appropriate education to meet his or her needs as NY State law requires.

High performing students are from all racial, socioeconomic and ability backgrounds. Taking away the academically rigorous programs in academically screened schools just because there are not enough for all is illogical. This would be like not giving out life jackets on a sinking HMS Titanic just because there weren't enough for everyone. High performing low income, minority and immigrant students who we should be supporting would be most hurt by this because their families won't have the resources to supplement learning through tutoring or other outside programs.

At the last PEP meeting I had the heartbreaking experience of listening to students from different schools co-located in the same building disparage each other simple because there is not enough school space. Sufficient school space is a fundamental right for all students and the most basic job that a Chancellor must get right.

However, instead of working hard to ensure basic provisions of a school system, Chancellor Carranza has spent the last two years since assuming his role on bloating the bureaucracy and implementing divisive policies that do not address the enormous achievement gap that is now worsening.

But as we know DOE has had a \$34BN annual budget after years of uncontrolled growth. This is \$31K per student, double that of the second most costly school system. Yet we keep getting told by the Chancellor and elected officials that this is still not enough. The PEP rubber stamp contract approval process and media reports inform us about the waste and corruption in DOE.<sup>123</sup>

And just yesterday reports surfaced that confirms what we have long suspected, the Chancellor secretly colludes with fellow ideologue special interest groups & ignores the views of parents across the city.<sup>4</sup> This is yet another example of the corruption rampant throughout the DOE.

The connections are clear. The scarcity our students face and the harm done by it is directly related to the waste and corruption of the DOE. This has been ongoing for years and now made worse by the COVID-19 crisis.

Chair Treyger – and all City Council members: I urge you to do your duty to hold the Mayor and Chancellor accountable.

Thank you for holding the hearing and for your prompt action.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://nypost.com/2020/05/11/yeshiva-reform-group-demands-resignation-of-top-doe-official/?utm\\_source=url\\_sitebuttons&utm\\_medium=site%20buttons&utm\\_campaign=site%20buttons](https://nypost.com/2020/05/11/yeshiva-reform-group-demands-resignation-of-top-doe-official/?utm_source=url_sitebuttons&utm_medium=site%20buttons&utm_campaign=site%20buttons)

<sup>2</sup> [https://nypost.com/2020/05/16/carranzas-claim-he-cant-cut-34b-budget-a-lie-advocates/?utm\\_source=url\\_sitebuttons&utm\\_medium=site%20buttons&utm\\_campaign=site%20buttons](https://nypost.com/2020/05/16/carranzas-claim-he-cant-cut-34b-budget-a-lie-advocates/?utm_source=url_sitebuttons&utm_medium=site%20buttons&utm_campaign=site%20buttons)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thecarranzafiles.com>

<sup>4</sup> [https://nypost.com/2020/05/26/nyc-doe-wants-competitive-school-admissions-opposers-to-get-louder/?utm\\_source=url\\_sitebuttons&utm\\_medium=site%20buttons&utm\\_campaign=site%20buttons](https://nypost.com/2020/05/26/nyc-doe-wants-competitive-school-admissions-opposers-to-get-louder/?utm_source=url_sitebuttons&utm_medium=site%20buttons&utm_campaign=site%20buttons)





## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council May 28, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Christina Bixland, and I work as the Education Director for Ping Chong + Company, which has been a vital part of New York City's cultural community for almost 50 years.

An integral part of the NYC performing arts ecosystem, Ping Chong + Company is a nimble organization, guided by values of beauty, innovation and social justice. Our work addresses culture, identity and belonging, using a community-engaged process to bring under-represented voices to the stage. Our K-12 education programs serve up to 2,000 students each year across the boroughs, and employs two dozen teaching artists (who, like many freelance workers, are among the most financially vulnerable in this time of cancelled live events.) Over the past 6 years we have been grateful for the opportunity to provide arts education services to schools across the boroughs, with the support of the DCA.

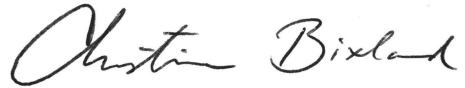
Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

**We call upon your support to ensure that budget cuts do not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs.** The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through

our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Bixland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "C".

Christina Bixland  
Director of Education  
Ping Chong + Company



## waterwell drama program

### Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council 5-28-2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Heather Lanza, and I work at Waterwell in Hell's Kitchen but our students come from all 5 borough's of NYC.

The mission of Waterwell Education is to train young artists, innovators, and leaders. Our training addresses the student-artist holistically and challenges students to develop both as interpreter and creator. Waterwell also creates new theater and trains new artists that entertain and enlighten. Waterwell seeks to prove itself a vital presence in the lives of its audience by remaining always responsive: responsive to the events affecting the world at large, responsive to changing modes of expression, and responsive to the individuals attending the performance. Waterwell endeavors to cultivate the inherent danger in live performance to create an exciting and unpredictable event — an event pruned down to its irreducible elements: human beings sharing a space and a story. Through entertainment and education, and through the humor, sadness, and hope its stories evoke, Waterwell hopes to empower its audience to change their lives and the world in which they live.

After schools closed, the Waterwell Education program was given one week to launch online learning. Our staff and faculty created a new digital model for our entire conservatory curriculum (Grades 6-12) and began teaching 7 days later. Matching the resilience of their teachers, our students responded strongly, with attendance actually increasing compared to before the crisis, and we are now in rehearsal for digital versions of three year-end productions. The pandemic has been a catalyst to create new models for online arts education, and we believe we can build on our success so far to reach more students in the near future. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Our most significant challenge has come from the NYC Department of Education. Normally at this time, we'd have \$125,000 remaining in our contract for the remainder of the school year. However, following a COVID-related budget cut of \$150 million, we were told that our payments are no longer guaranteed. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Arian Moayed, Co-Founder and Board Chair  
Lee Sunday Evans, Artistic Director  
Adam J. Frank, Managing Director  
Heather Lanza, Director of Education  
Christina Gonzalez, Education Associate  
Madelyn Murphy, Producing Associate

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

Dear Council Members,

I am a high school teacher at the Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School in Queens, a Brooklyn resident, and an employee of the NYC Dept. of Education since 2007. This is my first testimony at a City Council hearing, but my experience as a public school teacher over the past two months, and the mayor's proposed cuts to public schools, have convinced me that we are facing a critical moment at which the wrong choice could mean continuing crisis for hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

For the past two months my colleagues and I have been working around the clock to support our students and their families in remote learning. Our school community, like many around the city, has been particularly hard-hit by Covid-19. We do not yet know the full devastation and grief wrought upon our school. Our school system is providing essential services from 24-hour counseling to tech support, and the burden and strain on our schools will continue to be great into a very uncertain future. I am extremely concerned about the mayor's decision to severely cut the DOE's budget for next year. At a time when we should be pouring more public funds into schools, budget cuts send precisely the wrong message, and will devastate our school community beyond repair. As was glaringly clear from the mayor's hesitance to close schools in the first place, our public schools provide far more than an education- they are a lifeline for many families and the foundation of our promise to provide equality in opportunity to all New Yorkers.

When we (hopefully) return to our school building in the fall we need fully funded schools with enough counselors, social workers, nurses, and teachers to meet the needs of our traumatized students. We will need to replace the hundreds of laptops and iPads we gave out to students in need. More than ever, we will need funding for after-school programs and extracurricular opportunities that support our students and their families beyond 3:20pm.

Will you be voting against the mayor's budget proposal? Will you be pushing to fully fund our schools next year so that our children get the education and care they deserve? Will you stand with the students, parents, teachers, and school staff of this city to ensure that we put education funding at the top of the priority list for 2020? We cannot simply careen from one crisis to another, and investing in schools can help us collectively heal our city. Please stand with us in this fight, and push back against the Mayor's proposed budget for the sake of my students, their families, my colleagues, and the future of New York.

Thank you for your time.

Claire M. Wolff  
Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School

Pentacle (Dance Works, Inc.)

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Clarissa Soto Josephs and I am the Associate Director at Pentacle (based in the Financial District) and we work with a variety of schools and community centers across NYC.

The mission of our Education & Outreach programs is to facilitate a broad understanding of both performance and nonprofit career possibilities for youth. The In-School Program instructs youth in dance while inspiring them to explore a range of careers in the arts. Our Community Programs in under resourced NYC neighborhoods provide exposure to dance and to nurture professional development. The Career Development programs give college students and graduates work experience, mentorship, professional development seminars, and a peer network of colleagues. We work with over 300 students and young professionals each year.

Our programs have continued remotely through the pandemic with adjusted scopes to best respond to the communities in need. In a time when a future arts career seems inaccessible, we are continuing our necessary programs, supporting arts education at multiple educational levels. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through

our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Soto Josephs



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Recording Secretary – Jessica Zilo  
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Parliamentarian – Marie Plaisir

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Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/cpacnyc>

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May 29, 2020

Mark Treyger  
Education Committee  
New York City Council  
250 Broadway, Suite 1785  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Councilman Treyger,

We wish to express our sincerest thanks for all your efforts to work with the Department of Education and teachers to improve education in NYC, especially in the midst of the current Covid-19 pandemic. As we begin thinking about the fall, the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (which represents all the PAs and PTAs in NYC, and through them our parents) thought it important to provide our perspective as the DOE begins to think about the possibility of reopening schools in the fall. Our position paper, attached, deals specifically with the most difficult issue of reopening high schools, although many of the thoughts expressed apply to all schools.

We believe the following need to be in place for high schools to reopen in the fall. We believe all points are of equal importance and value.

- Clear Covid-19 mitigation methods must be in place in every high school.
- All high school students and staff must be surveyed to determine who will likely return to school in the fall, best practices for on-line learning, and the status of IEP implementation.
- High school students must have the right to continue with instruction through remote learning instead of attending schools in person.
- All high school students must have access to additional academic support.
- All high school students will need access to additional mental health services.

The attached position paper provides additional details on each of these points. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you further.

With much appreciation,

The Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council

Approved by the membership at the May 29, 2020 meeting

Cc: NYC Council Members Ben Kallos, Mark Levine, Ydanis Rodriguez, Rafael Salamanca Jr., Barry Grodenchik, Daniel Dromm, I. Daneek Miller, Eric A. Ulrich, Stephen T. Levin, Robert E. Cornegy, Jr., Brad Lander, Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Inez Barron, Justin Brannan, Farah N. Louis, Deborah Rose, Joseph C. Borelli





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Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/cpacny>

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## Requirements for NYC High Schools to Reopen in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The most challenging next step for the DOE as the country deals with the Covid-19 pandemic is how to reopen schools in the fall. We can all agree that students have been hard-hit by this pandemic, many falling behind academically; losing access to school meals; and dealing with additional stresses and anxieties as students deal with sick parents, siblings, relatives and friends (many of whom have died from the virus), economic insecurity as parents have lost jobs, and the lack of social supports as we have all hunkered down in home. As we inch toward reopening high schools, possibly as early as this fall, CPAC believes the following need to be included in any high school reopening plan (although many points will apply to all schools). We believe all points are of equal importance and value.

- Clear Covid-19 mitigation methods must be in place.
  - At a minimum, use CDC guidelines for schools; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>
  - Automatic dispensers of hand sanitizer (with a strong supply chain for hand sanitizer) must be present in every high school classroom and at the main entry to school buildings.
  - All bathrooms must have functioning sinks, toilets, and soap dispensers.
  - All classrooms and common areas (including but not limited to hallways and bathrooms) need regular cleaning of desks, tables and surface -- including in-between classes if students change classrooms and in-between lunch sittings if students eat in the cafeteria (students can do some of this cleaning but need access to disinfecting cleaning wipes).
  - The DOE must consider how to ventilate classrooms and offices without windows.
  - Social distancing must be possible, both within the classrooms and within hallways. For most of our high schools this will require a sharp reduction in class sizes, with schools operating in shifts becoming the new norm.
  - Every person in the school must be required to wear masks, which must be provided daily to students and staff.
  - All students must have access to Covid -19 testing.
  - No student or staff member should enter the building showing any Covid-19 symptoms. The DOE and schools must outline a process of who conducts temperature checks and who conducts and reviews brief health surveys.
  - Each school must designate a quarantine room where students or staff who begin to exhibit symptoms can be quickly separated from other members of the school community. Details of who supervises this room and how the room is maintained must be outlined.
  - The DOE must end the use of absenteeism in middle school and high school screenings to discourage parents from sending sick children to school.
  
- All high school students and staff must be surveyed to determine:
  - Whether high school students plan to return to high school in the fall (if schools are open) or plan to continue their education at home.
  - What has been successful for high school students in terms of remote instruction and what needs improvement. What are students' ideas to improve remote learning? What are teachers' perspectives?
  - Whether IEPs are being fully implemented. How can we make remote special education instruction more meaningful and helpful, given student and teacher perspectives?

- High school students must have the right to continue with instruction through remote learning instead of attending schools in person.
  - No child should be penalized for remaining home while the pandemic is a threat. While there are many reasons why parents may choose to keep students at home during the pandemic, many/most of our high schools students must use public transportation to attend high school, putting themselves, their teachers, and their families at added risk of catching and possibly dying from the coronavirus. On average, parents and grandparents of high school students are the oldest and most at risk group of parents and grandparents.
  - The DOE will need to create flexible programs for high school students, including evening and weekend remote learning opportunities. Given the economic collapse and deaths of family members, many high school students may need to have jobs or take on child care responsibilities during the day and will need support and flexibility to work toward achieving a high school diploma.
  - The DOE needs to work diligently to improve the quality of remote learning at the high school level, across all subjects and all levels of students. Remote learning must include actual virtual instruction from a teacher with the ability of students to ask questions and hold discussion, not simply posting assignments on-line. We must ensure high standards of instruction and consistent guidelines for all high school students who must learn remotely, which may entail having instructional coaches monitor remote instruction sessions to provide teachers with additional support.
  - Students who choose to continue with remote instruction must still have access to free breakfasts and lunches from sites close to their homes.
  
- All high school students must have access to additional academic support.
  - We need to ensure that high school students are not penalized for this year's educational disruption. They need support.
  - The DOE needs to provide remedial support for high school students over the summer and into next year to ensure that as many students as possible have the opportunity to remain on track. This support is particularly important in courses in which mastery is critical for success in later courses (for example, any math or foreign language class).
  - The DOE must ensure that IEPs are respected, both for students who attend high school in person and those who remain at home.
  - The DOE must strengthen classroom and on-line programs aimed at English Language Learners to assist them at mastering English and support them in classes taught in English.
  - All high school students who age out in 2020 must be given an additional year to complete their requirements to obtain a high school diploma or equivalent. Again, students need to be supported not penalized through this pandemic.
  
- All high school students will need access to additional mental health services.
  - High school students were already under tremendous stress prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the health, economic, and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have intensified depression and anxiety for many students. Other students may feel added stress and anxiety upon returning to school. Mental health and mentoring programs need to be in place in all schools and available remotely to support our students, including routine visual check-ins with students who remain at home.
  - The number of guidance counselors must be increased to help support students.
  - Both guidance counselors and teachers need additional training on how to support the mental health of students during the pandemic, including how to help students handle the health and financial stresses that may be afflicting students and how to help motivate students to continue with their education. Teachers and guidance counselors likely also need additional training on how to spot signs of physical or mental abuse of students who are learning remotely.
  - Many students may need RSAs (Related Service Authorizations) if schools are unable to provide the mental health services that students need.

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE TESTIMONY TODAY. MY NAME IS CHRISTINA MUCCIOLI AND I AM THE VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION FOR AHRCNYC—THE LARGEST NON-PROFIT IN THE UNITED STATES THAT SUPPORTS APPROXIMATELY 6000 INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

AHRCNYC IS ALSO APPROVED TO OPERATE SCHOOLS CITYWIDE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (CHAPTER 853 AND 4410 PROGRAMS) BY THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (NYSED). ADDITIONALLY, WE ARE A NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (NYCDOE) VENDOR CONTRACTED TO EDUCATE APPROXIMATELY 1000 STUDENTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 3-21.

OUR STUDENTS ARE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS –THEY RESIDE IN NYC AND THEIR PARENTS ARE TAXPAYERS AND CONSTITUENTS HOWEVER, DUE TO THE NATURE, SEVERITY, BEHAVIORAL AND CHALLENGING ISSUES RELATED TO THEIR DISABILITIES, THEIR NEEDS CANNOT BE MET IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING. MOST OF OUR STUDENTS HAVE A DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM. AS A CONSEQUENCE, THE STUDENTS ARE PLACED BY THE NYDOE’S COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN AHRCNYC SCHOOLS.

AHRCNYC SCHOOLS MUST FOLLOW ALL OF THE REGULATIONS AS SET FORTH BY THE NYSED AS WELL AS THE REQUIREMENTS OUTLINED IN OUR CONTRACT WITH THE NYCDOE. OUR TEACHERS THEREFORE MUST HOLD THE APPROPRIATE TEACHING SPECIAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATIONS AND FOLLOW ALL REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OUTLINED IN OUR NEW YORK CITY CONTRACT. WE ARE REQUIRED BY COMMISSIONERS REGULATIONS TO MAINTAIN MANDATED STAFF TO STUDENT RATIOS AND ONLY CERTIFIED TEACHERS CAN FULLY IMPLEMENT A STUDENT’S IEP.

DUE TO AN INABILITY TO PROVIDE COMPENSATORY PACKAGE LIKE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL COUNTERPARTS, AHRC FACES UNPRECEDENTED VACANCIES IN STAFFING. WHEN WE DO SUCCESSFULLY IDENTIFY A PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE THEY ARE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE NYCDOE’S PERSONNEL ELIGIBILITY TRACKING SYSTEM (AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS PETS). SIMPLY STATED THEY ARE REQUIRED TO UNDERGO A BACKGROUND CHECK AND MUST BE FINGERPRINTSED BEFORE THEY

CAN BE HIRED. WE APPLAUD NYCDOE'S POLICIES TO CLEAR AND CHECK ALL CANDIDATES.

**UNFORTUNATELY, WE FIND OURSELVES IN A QUAGMIRE. WE HAVE A NEED TO HIRE STAFF AND IN FACT HAVE IDENTIFIED APPROPRIATE CREDENTIALLED STAFF.** WE ARE UNABLE TO HIRE STAFF BECAUSE AND I QUOTE THE NYCDOE WEBSITE:

**“65 Court Street, including OPI offices and the HR Connect Walk-in Center, are currently closed. Governor Cuomo has signed the PAUSE (Policies Assure Uniform Safety for Everyone) Executive Order, which mandated non-essential businesses and government offices must close in-office personnel functions effective statewide.**

**As such:**

**All applicants will need to wait until 65 Court St. reopens to the public before coming down to be fingerprinted. The NYCDOE website (schools.nyc.gov) will be updated when the building reopens to the public”.**

WE REQUEST YOUR ASSISTANCE IN ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE WITH THE NYCDOE. WHILE THE PAUSE EXECUTIVE ORDER IS IN EFFECT, WE ASK CONSIDERATION OF ESTABLISHING A WAIVER OF PETS SO WE ARE ABLE TO HIRE TEACHING STAFF THAT WILL ONLY BE WORKING WITH STUDENTS REMOTELY. IF THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE, WE REQUEST CONSIDERATION OF UTILIZING ANOTHER MEANS OF CLEARANCE THAT IS CURRENTLY IN USE WITH OTHER REGULATORY AGENCIES LIKE OPWDD.

I CANNOT EMPHASIZE ENOUGH THE IMPORTANCE OF OPENNING UP THE PETS SYSTEM. WE NEED TO HIRE QUALIFIED PERSONNEL. OUR SCHOOLS MAY BE PHYSICALLY CLOSED BUT SCHOOL IS OPEN AS LIVE INTERACTIVE REMOTE LEARNING INSTRUCTION IS ONGOING AND SUCCESSFUL. OUR STUDENTS ARE FOLLOWING THEIR DAILY SCHEDULES AND RECEIVING THERAPUTIC SERVICES AS MANDATED BY THEIR IEPS. OUR PARENTS CANNOT PRAISE OUR STAFF ENOUGH AND SHOW A TRUE APPRECIATION OF THE CHALLENGES THE STAFF FACE ON A DAILY BASIS.

**OUR STUDENTS DESERVE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND FREE APPROPRIATE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION LIKE THEIR SIBLINGS AND NEIGHBORS WHO ATTEND PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RECEIVE INSTRUCTION BY QUALIFIED AND CREDENTIALLED PERSONNEL. PLEASE HELP US HIRE THEM!**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN THIS MATTER.

CHRISTINA MUCCIOLI

VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION



**Citizens' Committee  
for Children** of NEW YORK



Testimony of Daryl Hornick-Becker  
Policy & Advocacy Associate  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Presented to the New York City Council Hearing on Remote Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City's Schools

### **Committee on Education**

May 27, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Daryl Hornick-Becker and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 75-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions.

I would like to thank Chair Treyger, and all the members of the City Council Education Committee for holding today's hearing on remote learning and the impact of COVID-19 on the city's schools.

The size of the city's public education system – with 1,800 schools and 1.1 million students – poses immense challenges. It is widely understood that the city's schools have made real progress over the last decade across a wide range of indicators, including graduation rates, dropout rates and ELA and Math test scores. However, profound disparities remain within those educational outcomes, and the system itself is still deeply segregated by race and ethnicity. These disparities have been exacerbated in the transition to remote learning, with students across many communities struggling to adjust without devices, internet access, adult guidance, or even adequate space at home to learn.

In addition to the challenges occurring during the current school year, drastic cuts proposed in the Executive Budget in education and youth services will present more challenges for the summer and next school year. As we begin to recover from this crisis and parents seek to get back to work, not only will parents need child care options for younger children, but youth will also need access to programming and schools that combat learning loss and supports their social and emotional well-being.

In light of our current remote learning environment, and the summer and school year to come, CCC has highlighted several actions and restoration that need to be taken in order to ensure that the city's 1.1 million school children and their families not only will recover and survive, but will thrive following this pandemic.

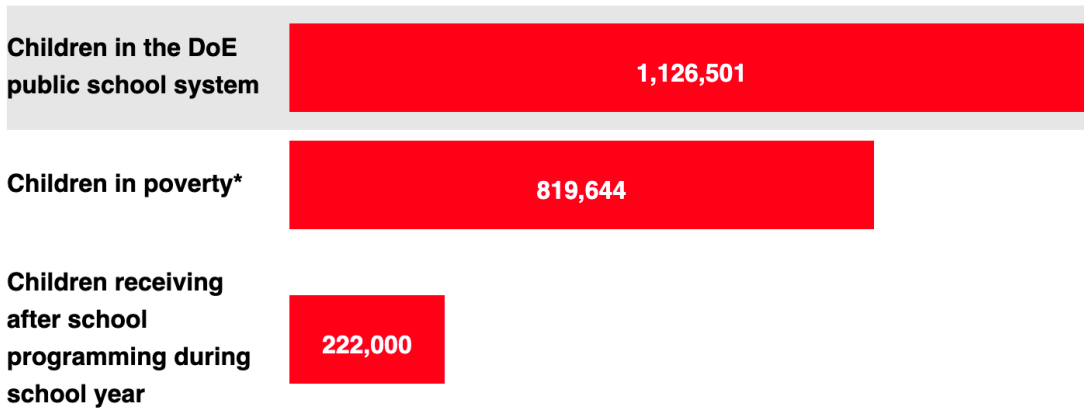
- **Fund summer youth programming as a vehicle for recovery**

New York City's expansive system of after school programs are a vital part of New York's human services sector and one of our city's greatest assets. The Comprehensive After School System of New York City (COMPASS) which includes School's Out NYC (SONYC), in addition to Cornerstone



programs in NYCHA housing and Beacon school-based programs, provide education, sports, recreation, art, games, and important skill-building opportunities to **approximately 222,000 children every year.**

These programs are intertwined with the public school system to serve a significant portion of the city's schoolchildren. During the school year, almost one third of the students considered in poverty according to the Dept. of Education participate in COMPASS, SONYC, Beacon or Cornerstone afterschool programs.



\*Students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or HRA benefits according to the DoE

Source: *Children in the DoE Public School System and Children in Poverty: New York City Department of Education. (School Year 2018/19). Demographic Snapshots. Children Receiving After School Programming: City of New York (Fiscal Year 2019) Mayor's Management Report.*

Just as important, these programs continue to serve youth over the summer after the school year ends. **Summer programs integrate both experiential, academic instruction and social-emotional learning opportunities to make learning joyful, combat summer learning loss, and build the skills necessary for school success and healthy development.**

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget eliminates all summer programming for youth, including the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), summer camps operated by the city's Comprehensive Afterschool System & School's Out NYC (COMPASS & SONYC), and summer programs run through Beacon and Cornerstone programs. **In total, this will leave nearly 175,000 children in NYC with no options for summer engagement.**

Children and Youth in Summer Programs



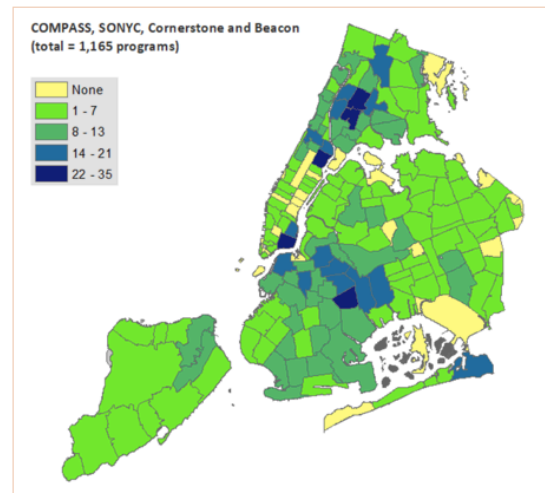


Some communities will be disproportionately affected by these cuts. **In several areas of the Bronx, northern Manhattan and central Brooklyn, there are 20 – 40 program sites that may lose their summer offerings.** Many of the same neighborhoods heavily-served by youth programs, are also neighborhoods that have had higher shares of positive COVID-19 tests than other areas of the city.<sup>i</sup> These include East Harlem, East Tremont, Morrisania, Washington Heights, East New York, Brownsville, among others.

**Top 10 Community Districts with After School Locations**

Community District	Count
East Harlem (M11)	49
Lower East Side (M03)	43
Washington Heights (M12)	40
East New York (K05)	39
Brownsville (K16)	37
Bedford Stuyvesant (K03)	35
Jamaica/St. Albans (Q12)	34
Concourse/Highbridge (B04)	33
Fort Greene/Brooklyn Heights (K02)	31
Morrisania (B03)	30

**COMPASS, SONYC, Cornerstone and Beacon Locations by Zip Code**



Source: CCC Analysis of Department of Youth and Community Development (June 2019) DYCD Program Sites.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, after school programs have adapted how they engage children and serve their communities. The community-based organizations (CBOs) that run these programs have developed and implemented innovative new ways of providing youth with academic and social-emotional learning, as well as art and recreation programming.

Providers are currently helping families with the transition to remote learning, troubleshooting technology issues, engaging in remote arts instruction, and helping deliver meals to families suddenly food insecure, all through online videoconferences and apps or through phone calls and texts. **All of these services must continue for the 178,000 students who will be taking remote classes this summer. The CBOs that serve these communities are intimately aware of the community’s needs, and stand ready to adapt to the new environment in order to provide youth with needed out-of-school engagement, and to prepare for the new school year.**

Youth engagement over the summer will be vital to meeting the emerging educational, health and economic needs of children and families as a result of the public health and economic crisis. Summer programming as part of a recovery effort would address the following areas:

1. Education– helping students overcome learning loss from the move to remote-schooling through building and strengthening cognitive skills, project-based learning activities and/or workforce development opportunities.
2. Social Emotional Health – offering youth opportunities to build positive and rewarding relationships with others and strengthen their self-efficacy and resilience. This is even more





important now considering the compounded trauma of social isolation, potential loss of a loved one, loss of a family's income, and housing and food insecurity.

3. Physical Health – providing opportunities for safe and regular physical activity and health and nutrition education, whether activities need to be socially-distanced or not.
4. Family and Home – supporting parents, caregivers, and families to help promote learning and healthy development in safe and stable homes.

Even with social-distancing measures in effect, many providers can still offer summer program alternatives that promote recovery. CBOs are ready to take the lead on designing and piloting new approaches to summer programming and services that can be adapted and implemented in response to our new reality.

COMPASS and SONYC programs serving younger youth can engage children in various ways at home, through education, arts, and recreation. If schools remain in session this summer, these programs can continue to deliver a full range of academic enrichment outside of school hours. For SYEP serving older youth, innovative remote assignments can provide employment opportunities that support training, career exploration, credentialing and skills development.

On the other hand, if social distancing measures are lifted this summer and businesses reopen, seasonal staff may be more crucial than ever, and summer programs can connect youth to critical ongoing and recovery-specific citywide initiatives, such as emergency food delivery, the DOE's Regional Enrichment Centers, census outreach, community resource mapping, and voter registration efforts.

**CCC and its partners in the Campaign for Children stand ready to work with the Administration and City Council to develop and implement creative solutions for youth programming this summer.** The success of our efforts will ensure that children and youth of all ages are prepared for school reentry, and that they and their families benefit from the supports needed to recover from this unprecedented crisis.

- **Expedite device delivery and expand REC enrollment**

The Dept. of Education has made great progress since the transition to remote learning, distributing over 280,000 devices to students thus far, and opening and staffing Regional Enrichment Centers (RECs) for the children of essential workers. However, more can be done to address the challenges of distance learning right now. At the end of last month, an estimated 19,000 students who requested devices were still awaiting them. We also consistently hear of families who are exasperated in their attempts to get devices or technological guidance to help their children succeed.<sup>ii</sup> **The DOE must expedite device delivery and continue to engage with families who need help as we enter the final month of the school year.**

But for some students just having a device is not enough. More than 1 in 10 students in NYC schools lacked permanent housing last year. These students already had significant obstacles to educational success, but the move to remote learning has presented a set of new challenges. Students in temporary housing are more likely to lack the physical space to learn remotely where they live, especially those who might also have siblings who are remote-learning, and they may not have a caregiver present to help them set up their access or guide them through the day. That's why CCC has joined with other advocates, the Comptroller, and members of the City Council to call on the DOE to **allow students in temporary**



**housing access to the city's Regional Enrichment Centers.** These centers, created to serve children of essential workers during the crisis, thus far have been under-enrolled but could provide needy students with better-suited environments to learn remotely.

- **Limit cuts to the Fair Student Funding formula**

Representing almost a third of the city's entire budget, the Dept. of Education is always a likely target for savings, even more so during our current budgetary crisis. However, reductions and disinvestments in public education, during a time when so many children will be combatting learning loss and experiencing trauma, will have both short-term and long-term negative impacts on child and family well-being. While many of the proposed cuts to education in the Executive Budget will be detrimental, none might be more harmful than the proposed \$100 million reduction to the Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula.

FSF is the source of the majority of funding for individual school budgets. Any reduction in FSF will directly result in reductions in school resources, and will force principals to make brutal choices when it comes to the next school year. **Smaller school budgets could result in teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, fewer counselors and social workers, and fewer course options.** The Mayor has indicated that schools currently receiving higher allotments of FSF will be prioritized when making cuts, but **these schools receive more funding because they need it, and thus the biggest cuts would be at schools with the most vulnerable students.**

These cuts will come at a time when students are returning to school after falling behind during remote learning, after losing a loved one to COVID, or after suddenly losing income, housing and food security, or all of the above. These compounded effects will be worsened when these students return to underfunded schools with fewer teachers, larger classes, and less support. **CCC urges the City Council to work with the DOE and the Administration to prevent or limit these cuts, and find savings in other budget areas that may be less directly harmful to New York schoolchildren.**

- **Target resources for the most vulnerable students**

Because the budget outlook is bleak does not mean we can turn our backs on the most vulnerable populations of students. Before this crisis, there were profound disparities within educational outcomes among different groups of students. These disparities have only been exacerbated in the transition to remote learning, with students across many communities struggling to adjust. **Now more than ever, the Council needs to support programs that will directly address these students; students who already experienced worse educational outcomes before this crisis and whose needs will be even greater following it.** We know funding is limited but we urge the Council to support several low-cost initiatives that will target these students.

When school buildings reopen, the DOE must ensure that every student can get there. Federal and state law require the city to provide transportation to students placed in foster care so they can stay in their original school, unless it is in their best interest to transfer schools. Starting in the fall, the DOE may need to figure out how to make transportation work in light of social distancing requirements and the potential of staggered scheduling. Currently, there is also not a single staff member at the DOE focused full time on students in foster care. **We ask the City Council to ensure that the final budget includes sufficient funding for the DOE to provide bus service for the relatively small number of students in foster**



**care who need it, as well as funding for at least one DOE senior staff member focused full-time on students in foster care.**

Additionally, CCC and its partners in the NY Immigration Coalition's Education Collaborative **urge the City Council to support a 3-year, transfer school pilot for newly arrived, high-school-aged immigrants.** While the City works to extend remote learning across the boroughs, we must remember that thousands of immigrant youth were not enrolled in school in the first place because they lacked access to programs that met their unique needs even before the crisis. Older immigrant youth consistently struggle to find adequate school placements, especially if they arrived after the age of 16. While budgetary difficulties will be exacerbated by the COVID 19 crisis, we cannot give up on these thousands of young people who deserve an opportunity to a meaningful education.

- **Continue to support students with disabilities and engage with their families**

We know that this period of remote learning has been difficult for students and families. We also know that the staff in the central DOE offices – as well as educators at many schools – have been working hard to make remote learning and services possible. **That said, CCC and its partners in the ARISE coalition have seen many challenges in providing instruction and services to students with disabilities during remote learning.** Examples include families with children whose special education needs mean they function below their chronological grade who are being given work meant for students at their age level – making it impossible for those students to complete the work and causing frustration for the students and their parents. Other families have reported that their children are getting all their work through assignments to do independently with no live instruction or meaningful teacher interaction. In addition, there are families whose children are not yet receiving all of their mandated related services remotely and who have not been asked for input into their children's Remote Learning Plans.

Students with disabilities are at particular risk of falling behind during this time of remote learning, and their needs are greater than those of their general education peers. They are also more likely to rely on in-person adult support—meaning that a student's ability to benefit from the instruction and services offered during remote learning often depends on their parent's availability, language, resources, and technology skills. The DOE has made progress in adapting special education plans to the remote learning environment during this school year, and we ask that they continue this important work over the summer school period and into the next school year **with particular focus on ensuring parents and caregivers are engaged in the process.**

- **Integrate early intervention and behavioral health care into child care settings and prioritize preschool special education**

CCC was heartened to see no substantial cuts to early childhood education in the Executive Budget, outside of the delay in 3K expansion. **High quality affordable child care is vital to reopening our economy and getting people back to work, but it is also one of the most important investments we can make in improving outcomes for the next generation; a generation that will be defined by this crisis.** While families have been sheltering in place due to social distancing requirements, many children have gone without critical Early Intervention or preschool special education services.

Earlier this year the city projected it would need approximately 1,000 to 2,000 additional seats for preschoolers who need a special class setting; classes with smaller sizes led by teachers trained to educate



students with disabilities.<sup>iii</sup> When schools reopen in the fall these students still may not have an appropriate class setting. CCC and other advocates are asking that **the DOE fulfill its legal obligation and provide a preschool special class seat to every child whose IEP requires one— either by opening more DOE-run classes or by ensuring CBOs do so.**

The city must also explore strategies to operationalize the integration of proven best practices at scale in early childhood settings to reach children and families most in need. Following Hurricane Sandy, many providers put in place trauma-informed training and curriculum models to address issues related to loss of life, loss of income, and displacement that many children and families experienced. Lessons learned can be applied to COVID-19 recovery efforts and brought to scale, including funding discussions with philanthropic groups if warranted.

It is estimated that the city may be receiving \$80 to \$100 million in federal child care resources from the CARES Act. These resources can be leveraged to support the developmental needs of young children with a keen eye toward trauma-informed approaches, as well as targeted investments to support extended day options for children (3 to 6pm), protect infant and toddler capacity, and to continue to serve the essential workforce.

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We recognize the enormous challenge facing the city in light of the economic downturn, as well as due to inadequate investments in education from the State, and CCC stands ready to support the city in advocating with State and Federal leaders to ensure New York City and our families and communities receive the supports so desperately needed. Those families hardest hit by COVID-19 are the same families that will suffer the most from budget cuts. We look forward to working with the City Council to strengthen the educational and youth services that will be necessary to recovery.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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<sup>i</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. *Keeping Track Online Database: Covid-19 Cases, May xx 2020*. Accessed on May 18th 2020. <https://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/1424/covid-19-cases#1424/a/6/1702/82/a/a>.

<sup>ii</sup> Alex Zimmerman and Jessica Gould. “Nearly 20K NYC Students Still Missing Promised iPads.” *The City*. April 26, 2020. <https://thecity.nyc/2020/04/nyc-students-still-missing-promised-ipads-for-remote-classes.html>.

<sup>iii</sup> Advocates for Children. “Waiting for a Seat: The Shortage of Preschool Special Education Class Seats in New York City.” January 2020. [https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/waiting\\_for\\_a\\_seat.pdf?pt=1](https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/waiting_for_a_seat.pdf?pt=1).

Remote learning does not satisfy the legal mandates of my child's IEP. He is a student in D 75 and what he requires, a computer screen cannot give to him. The City, particularly the DOE, is out of compliance and is ignoring the needs of its most vulnerable population. Shame on you. D75 needs summer school IN THE BUILDING. Anything less is criminal.

If the children of first responders and essential workers can have centers to go to, special needs students can have their schools.

Dawn Vollaro

NYC teacher and D75 parent

***Testimony, May 27, 2020  
Committee on Education  
Oversight – Remote Learning: The Impact of COVID19 on the City Schools***

Thank you for hosting this meeting and inviting our testimony. I am the parent of a dyslexic student. He was illiterate in 4th grade when we pulled him out of the public-school system and placed him in a school specializing in teaching dyslexic students. He is now at Bard High School Early College. Today I am representing all struggling readers as a Columbia Community Scholar researching poor literacy instruction and its connection to social ills, and I am representing the NYC Chapter of Decoding Dyslexia. I am a board member of Women Creating Change and Harlem Women Strong, and a member of the Arise Coalition.

There is a literacy crisis underlying the COVID19 health crisis. Literacy is a widely recognized determinant of health outcomes and is associated with many indices of academic, social, vocational, and economic success (Irwin Et al, 2007/Gaab 2020) But 73% of NYS 8th graders are not reading proficiently at 8th grade standards. And though we do not have literacy tests for voting, clearly our ballot initiatives and information you need to read to understand them or candidates' positions require literacy skills. Struggling readers are disenfranchised.

Moreover, nearly 50% of prisoners are functionally illiterate due to dyslexia (Moody, et al, 2000) with poor literacy instruction and 30% more are under literate. 40% of the homeless population is illiterate due to dyslexia. Since there is no connection between dyslexia and intelligence, we see "elite" school segregation as a symptom of poor literacy instruction as well.

Many NYC organizations are trying to plug holes in our literacy crisis. There are tutors, professional development organizations, publishing companies, book distribution agencies, mentoring organizations for kids with learning disabilities, organizations looking at cultural appropriate books and others dancing around the issue. Let's see if we can actually solve the crisis systemically rather than continue to prolong it.

Can we **take advantage** of remote learning to find our struggling readers in all schools and offering them the best literacy instruction via the internet? Nessy, a reading curriculum usually meant for use with teachers, offered free subscriptions to districts, teachers and families. Results from online learning with Nessy during COVID19 Spring were quite remarkable, with students **gaining a grade level worth of skills in six weeks**, working remotely without a teacher. **Dyslexic students** using Nessy for six weeks

during the COVID19 spring made **9/10 of a year's progress**. My son, when he was younger, at a summer camp for dyslexic kids gained a year of reading achievement in six weeks. Of course, they were also not in school being **un-taught** with strategies from Balanced Literacy that are antithetical to learning to read.

Can we create policies aimed at improving **preservice** education for teachers at CUNY (and other teaching colleges that get NYC funds), and on the state level aimed at the **licensing** of K-3 teachers and the **accreditation** of the teaching colleges and alternative pathways to teachings that would ensure K-3 teachers have a solid background in evidence-backed literacy instruction?

Debbie Meyer  
Dyslexia Plus Task Force in Public School  
Decoding Dyslexia NYC Chapter  
Columbia Community Scholar

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@ReadOrPrison

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We would thus **save** professional development costs the DOE spends training teachers in the science of reading developed in the 1940s, and save the special education costs in schools, and remediation costs in high school and at CUNY and other colleges. The mental health costs that frustrated readers create would be saved. The human potential would be unleashed adding to our economy.

Thank you.



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Testimony by DeNora Getachew  
New York Executive Director  
Generation Citizen

New York City Council Education Committee Oversight Hearing re: Remote  
Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City's Schools  
May 27, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Generation Citizen (“GC”) at today’s Education Committee hearing. My name is DeNora Getachew, and I am the New York Executive Director at Generation Citizen (“GCNY”).

**Overview of Generation Citizen & Action Civics**

GC is a ten year-old national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to demystifying democracy for youth by bringing civics education back into the classroom through a new, engaging pedagogy: Action Civics. Action Civics is a “student-centered, project-based approach to civics education that develops the individual skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for 21st century democratic practice” (National Action Civics Collaborative). It differs from normative, knowledge-based civic education in the same way that taking any “hands-on,” project-based, or experiential course differs from reading a textbook. Students learn about democratic structures and processes by directly engaging with them, as well as with each other to address one or more issues they care about, which are impacting their community.

During the last few election cycles, our nation has been powerfully reminded of the potential of youth political participation. According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, numerous statewide races have ultimately been decided by voters under the age of 29. While this trend is encouraging, it also underlines the necessity of reinvigorating civics education in schools, particularly programs that include project-based learning and real-world opportunities to engage in democracy, a hallmark of GC’s Action Civics program.

At this critical juncture in our nation’s history, we need systems that will create sustained youth participation. Now more than ever, we cannot rely on current events to motivate reactionary civic engagement, and it is the duty of our schools and communities to prepare youth for the lifetime responsibility of active citizenship. Second, we need to ensure that young people receive



an education that enables informed, effective participation, something the New York City Council has championed with tangible government support, serving as a national exemplar in public investment in civics education.

GC's Action Civics curriculum equips youth with the knowledge and skills needed to make an intentional impact on state and local policy. Finally, GC takes deliberate steps towards closing the Civic Engagement Gap, which is defined as a structural problem that is most pronounced among young people of color and those from low-income communities, predominantly in under resourced schools. Such students are half as likely to study how laws are made, and 30 percent less likely to report having experiences with deliberative discussions in their classes. GC focuses on educating youth in underrepresented communities because the organization believes that our American democracy is strongest when everyone participates. As the data shows, under resourced communities in our city, state and country are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These are the very communities that now more than ever need to understand how democracy works so that they can advocate for resources and policies to improve their lives and that of their communities.

In GC's Action Civics course, students debate issues directly affecting them, like affordable housing, improving the environment, gun violence, police brutality, or the impact of COVID19 on their lives, and work as a class to decide on one focus issue to address during the semester. Through GC's student-led program, students develop strategic action plans to effect systemic change on the identified issue, implement the plan by engaging directly with influencers and decision-makers, and present their findings at Civics Day, a semester-end action project showcase. Students learn valuable academic and life skills, like public speaking, collaboration, critical thinking, and how to work through difference. They also gain firsthand experience engaging in an important lifelong habit, understanding how they can directly inform and influence change in their community through the democratic process.

### **Civics Education during COVID19**

As the pandemic began to disrupt education in New York, and nationwide, GC rapidly shifted to remotely supporting teachers with implementing Action Civics through our Democracy Doesn't Pause initiative. GC uses Google Classroom to enable teachers to access GC's suite of curricular resources, coordinating video calls for students to interact with virtual guest speakers, as well as providing more frequent, and structured coaching support to help

teachers with compiling class-specific research and resources to support student civics projects.

GC adapted and revamped its civics education resources for educators and caregivers to engage young people and sustain high quality Action Civics education during distance learning. These free, downloadable activities/lesson plans for teachers and caregivers cover topics, such as:

- [Lobby a Legislator](#)
- [Young Changemakers](#)
- [Talking About Cens-US](#)
- [Our Community's Assets](#)
- [Countering COVID – How is your City Responding?](#)
- [What is an Ordinance?](#)
- [Write an Op-Ed](#)
- [Remove Barriers to Voting](#)

These resources are also available in Spanish [here](#).

### **COVID-19 and Project Based Learning**

As the nation's largest school district navigates COVID-19 and adapts to the need for virtual learning, schools and teachers are faced with the challenge of reimagining instruction. GC recommends that the City consider using project based learning (PBL) more frequently as an educational resource. In this disrupted educational environment, PBL is effective because it maximizes learning in an efficient way, especially at a time with reduced instructional hours.

PBL can be easily adapted to an asynchronous learning environment, which, as we have heard from an overwhelming majority of teachers, is the most effective format for virtual instruction. PBL develops the skills that promote 21st century college and career readiness, such as critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, receiving and using critical feedback, effective communication, applying knowledge and skills to real-world settings, innovation, creativity, and teamwork and collaboration skills, especially in a diverse group.

PBL provides a unique opportunity during the COVID-19 crisis to motivate and empower students by engaging them in an exploration and evaluation of their direct community and equipping them with the knowledge and skills

necessary to take action. GC believes the value of PBL, especially during this disrupted educational moment, is that it allows educators to connect and engage with students to ensure that learning does not feel so isolated, disconnected and difficult. PBL is more important than ever as a tool for students and teachers to engage with each other to take meaningful action to address issues impacting themselves and their community.

Implementing PBL through GC's Action Civics programming can have an incredible impact on students and teachers. In this student-centered model of civics education, students grapple with complex, authentic, real-world, community-based problems in a collaborative and action-oriented learning environment.

This is a federalist moment - perhaps the most vivid in history - and students can clearly see how governmental systems impact their lives firsthand. GC has heard from Action Civics educators that their students want to use their voice and experiences to impact their communities during this challenging time. For example, Kelly Preston a teacher at Urban Assembly Institute of Math and Science for Young Women in Council Member Stephen Levin's district recently spoke about the relevance of civics education and project based learning during this disrupted educational moment noting that despite the challenges of remote learning, students want to use their voice and be heard. She said the students have thoughts and opinions about everything happening around them from Cuomo's policies and press conferences to the civil unrest in Michigan.

This moment requires educators and administrators to think creatively and strategically about how to maximize learning - and project based learning is one of the most effective strategies for targeting a series of learning needs. Teachers need more tools and curriculum for project-based learning in this virtual format of learning, which must be paired with intentional and funded professional development that equips educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach these pedagogies.

Long time Action Civics teacher Cynthia Muldrow from the High School for Public Service in Council Member Mathieu Eugene's district recently remarked that remote learning has allowed for successful small group facilitation and for students to own more of the work. She has been able to divide the students up to work independently, and in small groups and join their small group working sessions to watch them effectively collaborate without much facilitation on my part.

In conclusion, young people are the present and the future of our democracy. And if we can actually give them the knowledge and skills they need to participate, they will make their voices heard — even in this moment, when young people are feeling so disrupted and uncertain, they want to make their voices heard.

GC believes that all students need an effective Action Civics education in order to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in democracy. We cannot expect youth, especially young people of color and those from economically disadvantaged communities, to participate if we don't teach them how the full contact sport of democracy works and how they can engage with democracy to make their voice heard. GC looks forward to continuing to partner with the Council to bring civics education to schools citywide during the critical 2020-21 election year to ensure democracy doesn't pause and that the next generation of New Yorkers develops the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for them to become active and engaged stewards of our democracy for the long-term.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. I can be reached at [dgetachew@generationcitizen.org](mailto:dgetachew@generationcitizen.org) or (917) 912-5471 with any questions.

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Diana Crum, Dance Makers in the Schools Program Director, Movement Research  
Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Diana Crum and I work at Movement Research, which partners with 7 schools in the East Village and Lower East Side, 1 in Yorkville, 2 in Bushwick, and 1 in Windsor Terrace to provide arts-in-education opportunities. In addition, I teach with Brooklyn Arts Council, ArtsConnection and at Brooklyn Prospect Charter School. I am very engaged in arts education and experience it in many roles. It is vital to our young people's childhoods and healthy development.

Movement Research is one of the world's leading laboratories for the investigation of dance and movement-based forms. Valuing the individual artist, their creative process and their vital role within society, Movement Research is dedicated to the creation and implementation of free and low-cost programs that nurture and instigate discourse and experimentation. Movement Research strives to reflect the cultural, political and economic diversity of its moving community, including artists and audiences alike. Dance Makers in the Schools brings the mission of Movement Research to the schools and invites children to learn as movers and makers. The program serves roughly 650 students, grades preK-12, and 11 school communities each year in over 300 sessions with 12-15 different teaching artists.

Since the public schools closed on March 15, 2020, Dance Makers in the Schools teaching artists and staff have worked tirelessly with school partners to provide online educational resources to students and families. We've created video lessons, participated in live sessions, and redesigned units of study so that kids can keep moving, continue creating, and stay engaged with their school communities. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Dance Makers in the Schools relies on public funding to serve young people. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Countless NYC youth discover a passion for the arts and build important life skills that help them in the future through our work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Diana Crum

## DONNIE WELCH POETRY

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

5/27/2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Donnie Welch and I am a poet and teaching artist working with special education students in schools all over Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

The mission of DONNIE WELCH POETRY and my work is to use poetry as a means of practicing and promoting self-advocacy for youth with autism and developmental disabilities.

As of now, I'm continuing to provide public school teachers I worked with over the school year with access to my poetry curriculum and resources despite our partnerships being discontinued. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Donnie Welch

May 25, 2020

We in NYC are at the epicenter of a worldwide crisis that is not over. Now is the time to invest in social emotional programming to support students and educators through this devastating pandemic and its aftereffects. Now is the time to invest fully in the wrap-around services our students deserve. And that means divesting from cops, security footage and metal detectors in schools.

My name is E.M. Eisen-Markowitz and I currently work at City-As-School Public Alternative High School and I'm a member of Teachers Unite. I've been a social studies teacher in NYC public schools since 2007 and a restorative justice coordinator since 2014 and it \*terrifies\* me that De Blasio has decided that it's more important to keep metal detectors in schools than it is to keep teachers and social workers. It is despicable that the Mayor wants to cut \$641 million from our schools next year while the NYPD is set to receive a \$5 million increase from the preliminary figures released in January.

**The City could save \$50,000,000 just by freezing hiring for New York City Police Department's School Safety Division.**

As the city navigates budget gaps, schools must not carry the weight of cuts while agencies responsible for the criminalization of young people and communities, with already bloated budgets, remain untouched and unquestioned.

**I join my colleagues, students and their families to ask you to fight for a just budget!**

Please prioritize the social and emotional well being of young people, their families, and the broader community:

1. **No hiring freeze on teachers and social workers.** Reject a hiring freeze on school staff and commit to funding restorative justice, healing and mental health support
2. **Fund health and sanitation for when schools return.** Ensure all schools have the staffing, funding, and supplies necessary to maintain exceptional, and, at minimum, sanitary conditions
3. **Restore SYEP and 75,000 jobs for young people.** Fund the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)
4. **Reduce funding for NYPD and institute a hiring freeze on New York City Police Department's School Safety Division** The DOE's contract with the NYPD passes \$427 million out of the DOE's budget. We urge you to oppose this wasteful spending.

When students and staff return to school, we will be grieving family members and loved ones. We need to be welcomed back to schools by their teachers, grief counsellors, programs, and opportunities for them to build their futures, not more police.

Please take a stand!



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Good Afternoon Chair Treyger and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Edward Matthews, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of ADAPT Community Network. Over the past several months, ADAPT staff and I had the opportunity to meet with council members and staff to discuss the work of our organization and our priorities as it related to discretionary funding to support our programs and services. Today, as you focus on remote learning and the impact of COVID-19 on the City's schools, I would like to discuss the implications and challenges it has had on children with disabilities. As we respond to the current crisis and prepare to reshape services for the summer in the upcoming school year, we will need the support of the local, state, and federal leadership to ensure that vital services for children with disabilities continue.

For over 74 years, ADAPT Community Network has been a leading service provider for children and adults with a variety of disabilities. Every day, we aim to build a more inclusive world for thousands of New Yorkers through education, technology, health, residential and recreational programs in all five boroughs. Accessible public education for all, community living for children and adults, advancement in assistive technology, and creating opportunities for employment, mark just some of our achievements in serving New Yorkers with disabilities across all five boroughs of New York City. ADAPT supports 20,000 children and adults with disabilities and their families. We work hard to facilitate growth and help people with disabilities reach their goals and true potential. We encourage people supported to become more independent while making meaningful connections in their communities.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has required all of us to think differently and to quickly shift to a new way of providing education to children with multiple disabilities. At ADAPT, we have transitioned all our students to an online learning environment. This required an influx of technology to reach over 1,600 parents, and creative, resourceful educators creating content and leading classes similar to those of non-disabled children. Our occupational, physical, and speech therapists are providing telehealth services.

As we strive to minimize expenses and maximize outcomes for everyone that we support, we've been able to make great strides. That being said, we still struggle with some fundamental technological needs for the children we support to thrive amid COVID-19. We anticipate that the repercussions from COVID-19 will have a more significant impact on disabled children, mainly because COVID-19 is interrupting vital services during student's most formative years. This will continue to have a larger impact post-COVID-19 if we are unable to receive the support we need now.

As distance learning is prominent today due to COVID-19, ADAPT's schools have needed to make quick transitions to allow people supported to continue to receive valuable services while social distancing at home. Touch screen devices and computers are in high demand as we start to find a new normal. It's much more difficult for the children we support in schools to receive these much-needed supports and to have access to video conferencing and computers so they can continue to receive speech, physical and occupational therapy while also continuing to learn through daily lesson plans. Since children with special needs won't be able to go back to school soon, we need to provide children with technology so they can learn remotely.

We are finding that parents are having difficulty using the iPads that have been loaned to them by the Department of Education. Many of the devices received have security and technological issues that need to be sorted out before they were able to use them. ADAPT is unable to assist with these issues that

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they are experiencing because the devices are security protected by the DOE forcing parents to work with DOE on rectifying the problems. All the while, it delays them from participating with their class and prevents them from receiving the support they need.

Since 1990, ADAPT Community Network was chosen by the New York State Assistive Technology Act Program (TRAID) as the New York City regional center for technology. We provide free assistance for all New York City children and adults; educating and acquiring Assistive Technology for them, allowing more independence in the home, school, workplace, and community. All families have access to our lending library, which offers a variety of informative books, articles, and audio-visual materials regarding child development. Computers with adapted keyboards and specialized software allow families to experiment with the most effective tools for their child. For children and adolescents with delayed or impaired speech, a variety of augmentative communication systems are available for loan.

As technological needs increase, ADAPT is unable to keep up with the demand. Having a library of laptops and tablets that are easy to use that could be lent out to families with the highest needs could help to alleviate some of the challenges and frustrations experienced by parents. Also, we need to be able to provide resources and tools to technologically adverse families. This would allow parents to continue to engage children in learning in a way that works best for them. Items such as word and picture boards for speech, toys to work on fine motor skills, and riding toys that help with balance and motility could all be extremely beneficial resources for families that don't have the means to purchase these things themselves. Yoga and movement and literacy videos and make that available to families to participate in with their children at their own convenience and would enhance the therapy that students are receiving.

Our biggest concern is for the students that have such a severe cognitive delay that they are unable to engage in remote learning. ADAPT's teachers, therapists, and school nurses are following up with the students and their parents every week to check in and offering support as needed. Still, their efforts can only go so far. This population of students needs to be in a therapeutic environment where they can continue to grow developmentally through in-person engagement. It helps them to form a common emotional bond with other students and staff, which has proven to be a challenge while learning remotely. Additionally, as parents are forced to go back to work, we will need to consider solutions for Day Care options. With additional funding, we would be able to expand supports and services to more children, which would lead to cognitive and physical progression for many students.

In addition, we need to ensure we have all the staff we need to help families while they are learning to work remotely in the midst of balancing many other obligations. While it's been helpful that fingerprinting required for onboarding has been waived for those who have previously been employed with the DOE, there is still a long wait for those who haven't. We are still facing a long wait time for the small pool of candidates out there who we want to hire but are unable to start until their fingerprints have been processed. We hope there can be additional modifications made to ensure that we have enough staff to provide the appropriate support throughout the duration of COVID-19 and after.

All of our efforts in the last couple months to quickly modify supports and services due to COVID-19 for children have been much appreciated by many parents and children who have the resources and technological means to participate and benefit from this type of learning environment. Despite all our

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endeavors, it's becoming increasingly more apparent that we need the support of local government to be able to keep on providing the necessary supports during these unprecedented times and help to fill in the gaps of resources while children are forced to stay home. We have a shared responsibility to ensure that children with disabilities receive the vital supports they depend upon and help to create a better future for all those within this community. Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to continuing to work with all of you in the year ahead.

## Impact of COVID 19 on the NYC's schools

I was registered to submit an oral testimony today, but was not able to commit to such a lengthy meeting and had to leave the zoom meeting before my opportunity came up. Today I am writing as a District 20 parent but I am also a District 20 High School administrator. Thank you for reading my thoughts here.

One group of students that has been largely overlooked in our unsuccessful transition to remote learning has been our MLL students. My daughter is a 17 year old Emerging level MLL student who is also a Student with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). I began parenting her after she entered the NYC foster care system in 2019. You might be able to imagine some of the traumatic life experiences she has endured. You might have an idea of what trauma does to a developing brain and what interrupted and limited education does to the developing brain. This is studied by neuroscientists and there is some neuroscience data available. Unfortunately, there is not an overwhelming amount of data on SIFE students, however, as a teacher of MLL students and the supervisor of the largest MLL program in south Brooklyn, I have had extensive experience working with traumatized migrant youth. Additionally, I am a licensed and trained therapeutic foster parent in NYC. Foster licensing involves studying trauma.

My daughter is one of thousands of students in our city that share some of these classifications: SIFE, EMerging MLL, Student in Temporary Housing (STH), foster child, Indigenous, undocumented.. So her situation speaks to the situation of thousands of other students.

All students but particularly low proficiency SIFE MLL students need the face to face support of a teacher. That is not possible in remote learning. Furthermore, there has been an assumption that all students would be well equipped to do work on a technological device and through unfamiliar technology platforms. As NYC is a city of immigrants, you all must be aware that abject poverty is one of the leading conditions that spurs migration. Not all students and families have device fluency, not all schools, in fact most schools don't have one to one device capacity.. So this period of remote learning has become, for many, an assessment in the ability to use a computer or a tablet, not the ability to master the content standards.

Truth be told, ask any MLL student and the overwhelming majority do not have a computer, tablet of their own, and they or their guardians may NEVER have owned a device like this in their lives. When Karina came into my care it was the first time in her life that she had access to a TV. Pay as you go phone services were one of the first things to go in these students' lives when economic stability became more precarious. ..

Technological literacy is a real thing. Many of our students are technologically illiterate. Giving them a device will not close the digital divide. This is a false equivalency.

I want to continue with addressing some of the experiences I have been having with my 1st grade son. There has been no consistent live instruction or taped instruction. His teacher has held 4 google meets for socio emotional check ins, since mid March. The cluster teachers have

done no live instruction. Additionally, much of the work assigned by the teacher has required me to have a printer. I have had to supplement the one hour of work per day provided by purchasing educational books and other educational tools. I am a licensed teacher. I am designing learning experiences for my son. If I was not able to do that, which many parents can not do, there would be no instruction occurring.

This situation of remote learning set up by the NYC DOE, in coordination with the UFT, which permits for no accountability for live instruction or high quality instructional materials is not improving and is thereby further exacerbating economic inequalities and systemic access to power and economic mobility. This is a major violation of civil rights, access to education and equity.

I know the rights entitled to my daughter under the CR- 154. I understand the NY Board of Regents waived some compliance mandates when we transitioned to remote learning but the state believes MLL students should still be receiving their services. How can Entering level MLL students, who require 540 minutes of MLL support per week, be getting their legally mandated service with no required live instruction?

Students who were not successful this spring will re do their work in the same manner/ same platform over the summer.. Where is the logic there?

Students need their schools. They need their communities. We need to have the courage, as a city, to take the risk and do what is right for our children or future generations..Yes, there is an inherent risk of returning to our school buildings. The risk of infectious disease was in fact always present. The city needs its leadership to step up and make and plan and communicate this plan with us, your constituents. Families need the support of the public educators that are being paid their full salaries to educate our youth and to provide the continuity of a community that is invested in their equity.

I have high school students at my school yet to receive devices. This is nothing but an utter failure and there will be no solution for ensuring equity in the fall. You must restore our school buildings to ensure educational access and opportunities which are a civil right. Children First.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

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## Greater New York

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committees on Youth Services and Community Development

Submitted by Reach Out and Read of Greater New York

May 22, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Emily Marchese, Executive Director of Reach Out and Read of Greater New York. For 20 years, Reach Out and Read of Greater New York has worked with pediatricians and medical providers across New York City to provide families with new, developmentally appropriate books and anticipatory guidance in support of early literacy. Together, we have impacted over 6 million families in New York City. In 2014, we became a founding partner of City's First Readers, a collaboration of 12 organizations each working on an aspect of early literacy. Together we are stronger and have more impact. Both Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and City's First Readers have been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics for its effectiveness. We are truly grateful for the City Council's generous support of City's First Readers.

**Through the COVID-19 crisis, Reach Out and Read of Greater New York has remained open and fully operational, providing critical educational resources to families with no other options available.**

With schools and libraries closed, the best way to reach the most vulnerable New Yorkers is through the hospital and clinics that are still open and the virtual resources and relationships that we and our partners have in the community. **We work in partnership every year to support over 250,000 children and families across New York City with multiple touch points.**

[Click here to view a brief video on our current, fully operational programming for vulnerable New Yorkers.](#)

ROR GNY's model was created by pediatricians that founded our organization in 1997. Today, ROR GNY has grown to 233 program sites. We deliver services to more than 255,000 children—from newborns through 5 years old—and their families at hospitals and community health centers in some of the most underserved communities of New York City every year.

Our evidence-based program trains pediatricians and medical providers to effectively encourage the development of habits that support early literacy. Then, building on the unique relationship between families and medical providers, ROR GNY gives parents and guardians the tools they need to develop their children's early literacy skills. Our program has three components that work in tandem:

- ⇒ **Consistent engagement:** At each well-child visit, children receive a new, developmentally and culturally appropriate book from their pediatrician to take home and keep;
- ⇒ **Expert support:** Medical providers offer tips and age-appropriate advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud with their children;
- ⇒ **Parent and community engagement:** Volunteers read aloud with children in the pediatric waiting room. Every child we serve leaves our program with at least 10 books to build their home library—and parents/caregivers now have the tools to engage in participatory reading out loud with their children on a regular basis.

## How We Are Adapting Our Program Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic

During this challenging time, the events happening in our community and around the world are unsettling, unprecedented, and filled with so much uncertainty. As a healthcare-based program, we have the utmost respect and support for our medical providers who are working tirelessly to care for patients affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Even with so much of the near and long-term future unknown, one thing we know for sure is that the 250,000 children we serve every year need ROR GNY now more than ever.

We believe the ROR GNY mission is even more powerful and important during these difficult times. It is in such times of anxiety when children most need to feel safe and loved – and one of the best ways to support and engage children is to read books together. Reading together promotes bonding and builds strong emotional connections. When children are cuddled in the lap of a loving caregiver, enjoying a book together, they feel secure, despite the turmoil in the outside world. Additionally, since approximately 90% of brain development occurs during the first five years of life, it is crucial that parents/caregivers of children ages 0-5 are reading aloud to their children during this time.

A very recent study conducted in April 2020 by Global Strategy Group on behalf of Raising New York shares the results of a statewide NY survey on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on parents with infants and toddlers. This study reports that 68% of those surveyed indicated they worry their child's social, emotional, and cognitive development will suffer as a result of the coronavirus crisis. The study also reports that more than 1 in 3 parents of infants and toddlers who rely on early intervention/education programs that provide coaching for new parents are no longer receiving services, and 49% said they were not given the option of online services.

We know that the under-resourced communities that we are privileged to serve are being disproportionately impacted by the shutdowns and cancellations surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. In research conducted by neuroscientists that followed children from low-income backgrounds from birth through late adolescence, “findings highlight[ed] the sensitivity of the growing brain to environmental factors and provide strong evidence that subtle variations in early life experiences can affect the brain throughout life.”<sup>1</sup> During this high-stress time when libraries are closed and education/literacy programs are limited or unavailable, it is more critical than ever that we provide support and resources to the high needs neighborhoods of NYC that we serve.

While other literacy resources for children are retracting (for many legitimate reasons), ROR GNY's program continues to be there for children and their parents/caregivers who will otherwise have no access to books and literacy resources. Many of our hospitals and clinics are still open for well child visits for ages 0-2 and for vaccination appointments ages 3-5. As a result, books and anticipatory guidance for caregivers is still being distributed to our families, as well as information regarding ROR GNY's virtual resources. The following details how ROR GNY is responding and adjusting to meet the needs of the communities we serve virtually. The goal is to provide joyful, educational content in many formats to help our communities easily access resources:

1. We are hosting multilingual (English, Spanish, Mandarin, Bengali, sign language, and more to follow) Facebook Live read alouds for children ages 0-5 every day. Some guests include Doreen Cronin, the author of Click Clack Moo and Cows that Type, and Susie Jaramillo, the author and illustrator of the Canticos bilingual book series. We've featured guests reading to their pet, reading along with music, and reading together with a virtual friend. We believe that through virtual story times, we can offer parents and caregivers practical support and create meaningful moments, which will help their whole families manage in this anxious time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wired.com/2012/10/books-growing-brain/>

2. We have compiled a list of free, virtual literary resources and educational enrichment that we hope will help foster creativity and imagination and provide families with fun, high-quality learning opportunities. We are continually adding to this list and sending out new resources via social media and e-blasts. This is updated multiple times a day and freely available on our website.
3. We are hosting free bi-lingual (English and Spanish) virtual workshops for caregivers and families. The workshops invite all adults to join us via zoom to decompress and learn some fun, easy tips on how to create a literacy friendly household during these times. The sessions are recorded and offered on our website and social media for easy access. They also include a bi-lingual one-pager summarizing the recommendations presented in the workshop.
4. We are continuing to support the supply chain of books being delivered to hospital sites that can still receive them, and we are supporting each location's decision making in terms of what's best for their site. We are conducting virtual site visits to our 233 partners via Zoom during this time. We believe that through anticipatory guidance and books, our partner sites can offer parents and caregivers practical guidance about building meaningful moments and routines, which will help their whole families manage in this anxious time.

There is no telling how long New York's services and activities will be suspended; therefore, ROR GNY will continue developing more ways to virtually support and engage our program participants and partner sites, while continuing to distribute books at our fully operational program sites across New York City. We remain committed to fulfill the mission of this organization as a lifeline to literacy and healthy brain development.

By investing in our early childhood literacy intervention, your support will be able to make a direct and significant impact on the lives of the children who need it most.

Please see below for 150+ signatures from our healthcare partners in support of Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and City's First Readers continuing to have discretionary funding support in FY21.





## PETITION TO ELECTED OFFICIAL

To Our Public Officials:

We, the medical providers and frontline champions of New York City, respectfully submit this letter of support on behalf of early literacy programs. We, the heroes of today, urge you to support the heroes of tomorrow by continuing to invest in Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and City's First Readers as an essential part of the budget. Reach Out and Read of Greater New York's partnership with City's First Readers has allowed over 250,000 children this year alone to benefit from multiple dosages of excellent and efficient early literacy support.

### READING IS ESSENTIAL

In the face of this public health crisis, where basic needs are in jeopardy and the well-being of all is threatened at every turn, it may appear that funding for early literacy is discretionary. As medical professionals who deal with children on a daily basis, we assure you that it is a critical need. Literacy levels are strong social determinants of health, civic engagement, and economic self-sufficiency - positive behaviors that help our society overall. Low levels of literacy are also correlated with incarceration and both juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Prevention beats intervention. The Return on Investment for high quality early childhood programs is cited as 13% <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>

This pandemic has already revealed systemic inequities in access to healthcare and treatment. COVID19 disproportionately affects children living in poverty and consequently children of color. We express profound concerns that these most vulnerable of children will return to school having had little or no engagement with print materials for nearly six months, possibly more, with their neural wiring now more accustomed to a screen than the left-to-right eye movement of reading. Reach Out and Read of Greater New York gives out over 250,000 books every year through our hospitals and clinics. It is critical that pre- and emerging readers continue to be supported by quality early literacy programs throughout the duration of this health crisis and well beyond.

Programs like Reach Out and Read of Greater New York and City's First Readers, which have both been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics for their effectiveness, must continue to be offered as investments which make both fiscal and social sense. We urge you to consider the long term benefits of supporting early literacy along with the long term consequences of withholding support. We advocate on behalf of our patients, the children of New York City.

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### Committee on Education Hearing

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

**Erica Huang, Asian American Student Advocacy Project, ASAP Youth Leader**

Hi. I'm Erica, and I'm an Asian Pacific American, here to testify for ASAP, the Asian American Student Advocacy Project at CACF. That's right—I, an Asian— have been invited here to speak about the Asian perspective, the Asian experience. People want to hear about how it feels to be that smart kid in the corner, scribbling away at math problems. People want to hear about how it's like to be the white man's best friend. We're comedic relief in 90's sitcoms. We make comfort food that hopefully slides down easier than the racial slurs thrown at us.

Ok, I'll start over. Hi. I'm Erica, an Asian Pacific American. *An* Asian Pacific American. I'm not here to talk about what it means to be Asian or to have my blood-stained existence tokenized or answer that question of "Are Asians *really* people of color?" because truthfully, the world's confusion is contagious. People seem to think that Asians are only one thing or maybe they only want to *hear* one thing. "Speak up!"—My white teacher eggs me on. And so I do: I speak my mother's trauma, I speak coping with suicidal ideation as my teacher hands back 0 after 0, I speak being trapped in a school with white peers and feeling like *not even a person* compared to their brown hair and blue eyes and interesting lives articulated in perfect English. I speak lies to my friends and parents that the failing grade the DOE is now calling an "incomplete" was actually just a printing error.

The system tells us to focus on the numbers. "The numbers will get you far." Our parents, who've had to adapt to this system, tell us: "We're only numbers to the people here, so polish them." People say numbers don't lie. Good, smart students get good grades and are thereby *entitled* to the city's bulk of resources; the rest of us are left to fight over the scraps. This is the logic of our school system and the logic that my parents, not here to take risks, have had carved into their hands, next to their scars.

I'd like the people, who think that all APA's are thriving in this system, to meet my friends, who have been condemned to the label of "bad Asian." I'd like them to meet my friends, who feel disengaged from academics and prefer to play ball, but at the park, not their underfunded schools. I'd like them to see the glasses shattering in families over a report card, on top of frozen pizza dinners, and the stress of essential work during this time. See how it feels to be rejected by the city and your community at the same time by those who ignore factors like language access, poverty, and mental health.

COVID-19 has made it loud and clear that our school system is full of inequities. More than ever before, students are slipping through the cracks like ghosts. As immigrants, on top of worrying about their schoolwork and dealing with poverty, in a system full of language barriers and devoid of cultural competence, many APA youth are their parents' translators, their siblings' teachers, and more.

Yet we are here and committed to working with our fellow students of color, immigrant students, and marginalized students for equitable access to resources and opportunities because, truthfully, we need it too.



**UNITED  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
HOUSES**

45 Broadway • 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor • New York, N.Y. 10006-3007  
(212) 967-0322 • [www.unhny.org](http://www.unhny.org)

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair  
At the Oversight Hearing on Remote Learning**

**May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Thank you Chair Treyger and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify on remote learning. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 43 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

This testimony will focus on some of the remote learning activities conducted by settlement houses and other community-based organizations. CBOs have been carrying out remote learning activities since COVID-19 began, and the FY2021 Executive Budget cuts to DYCD programs will make it impossible for these remote learning activities to continue in July and August. We make an urgent plea for the City Council's support in ensuring that the City maintains services for youth this summer.

DOE plans to conduct centralized remote learning activities in the summer through the public schools. However, this plan will not address the issues of social isolation and disengagement that youth development programs can address even when conducted remotely. Centralized programs often do not have the hard-earned community connections and credibility that CBO youth services providers offer. And without durable social bonds and connections to both their peers and adults, it will be even harder to maintain social distancing.

**Remote Programming at CBOs**

New York City's settlement houses and community-based organizations have adapted quickly in the face of devastating circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within days, programs including COMPASS/SONYC and Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers as well as DOE contracted center-based and family child care early childhood education pivoted from in-person programming to remote, virtual engagement for children, youth and their families, while also supplementing local food distribution for families. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are currently offering online tutoring support, art and recreation programming, as well as behavioral health care and additional supports to youth and families through grab-and-go meal provision and grocery delivery for many households.

When the City announced the rollout of Regional Enrichment Centers (RECs) to provide early childhood education opportunities for the children of essential workers, CBOs, including youth services providers, rose to the occasion and deployed their own staff to support the RECs. They developed prescriptive lesson plans that conformed to Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) social-distancing standards while simultaneously providing social-emotional supports to children who were dealing with a wide range of difficult circumstances.

As these providers were in the middle of ramping-up planning to continue and expand these efforts in summer 2020, Mayor de Blasio announced the Fiscal Year 2021 Executive Budget, eliminating funding for all summer Beacon, Cornerstone, COMPASS/SONYC, and SYEP programming. Though the Mayor cited health and safety concerns as justification for the elimination of these programs, youth services providers themselves were never given an opportunity to weigh in on this decision in advance. Had they been asked, they could have shared the tremendous knowledge they have gleaned through pivoting to a combination of remote and in-person, socially-distant programming to help inform alternative models that would keep youth engaged and supported while keeping them safe.

It is essential that New York City have program options in place this summer for youth to ensure that they have constructive activities that support their well-being and recovery after a difficult spring. Similarly, their parents, including many parents who are essential workers, need the security of knowing that there are secure child care arrangements. Summer recovery programming is more important than ever given the sudden and extreme challenges youth and their families face this spring due to COVID-19. To ensure that young people and their families are supported, New York City must provide funding to CBOs to address the following needs whose urgency is exacerbated by the crisis of COVID-19:

1. Education – helping students build and strengthen cognitive skills through project-based learning activities and workforce development opportunities;
2. Social Emotional – offering youth opportunities to build positive and rewarding relationships with others and strengthen their self-efficacy and resiliency
3. Health – providing opportunities for safe and regular physical activity and health and nutrition education; and
4. Family and Home – supporting parents, caregivers, and families to help promote learning and healthy development in safe and stable homes.

On May 12<sup>th</sup>, the Campaign for Children and Campaign for Summer Jobs released a summer recovery plan for school aged youth. Recognizing that services in the summer would likely be a combination of remote learning programs and socially-distant in-person programs for the families of essential workers, the summer recovery plan contains plans for remote and socially distant in-person programs as well a plan for a remote Summer Youth Employment Program. The plan was developed after eight weekly online convenings of 100 youth services providers.

We urge the City to work with its contractors, the CBOs, to implement this plan. The Mayor's budget proposes a total absence of summer programming. That is likely to lead to its own set of health and safety problems for NYC's youth and families. Young people are unlikely to remain safely indoors in cramped apartments heading into the second or third month of social distancing, especially when the weather begins to improve.

For children and youth, school closures and stay-at-home orders have blocked access to essential resources necessary for healthy development: regular nutritious meals, physical activity and time

outdoors, positive relationships with peers and community adults, academic and social-emotional learning opportunities, etc. Many children are sadly experiencing the illness and loss of caregivers or multiple family members and are at risk of losing potentially unrecoverable ground academically.

Programming will give them a reason to stay inside while offering a unique checkpoint for their social- emotional health and ensure that they are prepared to begin in-person school when the time comes in the fall. In the case of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the loss of those wages could be disastrous for many families that depend on them during regular years, let alone in the midst of an economic recession that has brought record-breaking unemployment numbers to communities-of-color hardest hit by the pandemic.

## **Remote Program Design and Staffing**

Regardless of the health circumstances in summer 2020, it will be important to have remote learning options available. Even if social distancing measures are relaxed many parents may reasonably opt for remote programs over in-person due to residual fears even if the City is slowly opening back up. The summer recovery plan outlines necessary parts

### *Program Design*

- COMPASS/SONYC, Beacons, and Cornerstone programs have quickly pivoted to online, remote programming from literacy, STEM, homework help and tutoring to music, dance, karate, and fitness all delivered online via video-conferencing. Many young people have adapted to this style quickly with providers reporting regular attendance. For those who have not adapted, summer presents the only opportunity to engage them before the potential start of school in September.
- One-on-one check ins with students/families is critical to ensure young people and their families are able to communicate their needs and concerns. Furthermore, CBOs use these check-ins to coordinate referrals and other supports for the whole family. They are also critical academic and social/ emotional supports and interventions.
- A combination of remote learning technology, such as Google Classroom, and analogue activities that can be completed with common household supplies can help ensure youth are not spending too much time staring at screens. Reading assignments are encouraged as well as a great way to prevent over-exposure to screens.

### *Staffing*

- It is important that experienced staff be running these programs—where possible, programs should ensure they have credentialed social workers on staff to aid with social/emotional supports.
- CBOs should have experienced youth development staff managing the programs to ensure that the technical, emotional and academic needs of participants can be appropriately managed and addressed.
- Two staff should be moderating any live video conferencing programs at a time to ensure programming is kept safe and secure.

### *Funding Levels*

- Funding levels should be adequate to ensure that programs can employ youth development staff who have experience working with the communities they are serving. In most cases, this would require maintaining their existing program directors as 12 month staff.
- Funding levels should be adequate to ensure that CBOs can hire licensed social workers.
- Funding levels should guarantee that CBOs have the technology to implement remote

learning.

### **Summer Programs in the FY 2021 Budget**

CBO providers stand ready to work with the City to ensure safe and enriching programs this summer. These programs are necessary both to maintaining social distancing and to the City's recovery from COVID-19. We call on the City to restore funding for COMPASS/ SONYC, Beacon, Cornerstone summer programs and SYEP immediately so that providers can begin to prepare both remote programs and socially distant summer programming for the families of essential for the families where parents are continuing to work.

Gwendolyn Boniface

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Gwendolyn Boniface, and I am a graduate student studying applied theatre at the CUNY School of Professional Studies. I have previously worked in arts education through organizations like The Leadership Program, where I was a teaching artist at PS 315 in Brooklyn.

The mission of The Leadership Program is to teach, and their programs are designed to engage students, teachers, and employees and create a transformative experience that empowers them to become the best leaders they can be. While working for TLP, I had the incredible opportunity to witness a diverse group of young women who had previously dealt with bullying and racial tensions begin to form a community and develop their voices through writing and theatre-making.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Boniface

Friday May 22nd, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jaime and I am a resident of the Borough of Brooklyn.

I'm sending this message today from a point of concern. As the city navigates budget gaps, students must not carry the weight of cuts while agencies responsible for the criminalization of young people and communities, with already bloated budgets, remain untouched and unquestioned.

**As you negotiate the budget, I ask that you prioritize the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, their families, and broader community:**

- Reject a hiring freeze on school staff and commit to funding restorative justice, healing, and mental health support
- Expand health and sanitation measures in schools
- Restore funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)
- Reduce spending for school policing and institute a hiring freeze on the NYPD

Please take a stand.

The DOE's contract with the NYPD passes \$427 million out of the DOE's budget. When it is your time to ask questions of Chancellor Carranza, **I urge you to oppose this appropriation of school funds to the NYPD to fund the harmful surveillance and policing of young people.** Please advocate for a budget that funds education and equity in schools, not criminalization.

Sincerely,

*Jaime Chew, Brooklyn Resident*





May 27, 2020

Bridging Education and Art Together, Inc. (DBA: BEAT)  
44-02 23rd Street, Suite 414  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
[www.beatglobal.org](http://www.beatglobal.org)  
EIN: 27-4244192

Dear New York City Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of arts education. My name is James Kim, and I am the Executive Director of Bridging Education and Art Together, Inc. (BEAT), an arts nonprofit organization based in Long Island City.

BEAT's mission is to unlock the social, emotional, and creative potential of underserved youth and people with disabilities through our Hip Hop-based arts education. We believe in the transformative power of Hip Hop to uplift and heal our bodies and minds -- especially during this time of great need for hope and encouragement.

Before the pandemic, on average, we positively impacted over 1,000 lower-income students and students with disabilities per academic year through our beatboxing, breakdancing, and lyricism workshops. NYC's Department of Education and Department of Youth & Community Development have been our two biggest partners in providing a safe haven for our youth to creatively express themselves through our culturally responsive programs.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city.

Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first. Immediately following mandated closures due to COVID-19, we pivoted our programs to online platforms to continue offering our programming to our students in support of their emotional wellness. Based on their feedback, we know that the arts will play an increasingly crucial role in restoring the hopes and dreams of our youth.

Engagement in the arts supports the development of important life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and empathy, which help our youth thrive in the future. Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts through school-based programming. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city and need continued support to explore the arts.

NYC's arts and cultural organizations, like BEAT, are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to make our communities stronger as we rebuild. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Kim', with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back under the name.

James Kim  
Executive Director, BEAT  
917-862-7208  
james@beatglobal.org

First I want to thank Councilman Treyger for having this public forum. I am a big supporter of the Councilman and think that he does a tremendous job for his constituents.

My question is in regards to the States Academic Policy and their view on the REGENTS WAIVERS. Currently Academic Policy has made it clear that the only way for high school students to receive the regents waiver is that they pass the entire course. While this might seem fair on paper, it is wholly unfair to schools that run semesters and trimesters (most of the city).

If a student is in an annualized school (many non-city schools), they receive a final grade in June. If a student passes that class, they receive their regents waiver. This means a student can be failing from September - May, but still pass the course and receive their regents waiver in June.

A student in a semester (or trimester) course does not have this same opportunity. If a student in a semester school fails in January, it goes on their transcript and they are AUTOMATICALLY disqualified to receive their regents waiver in June (even if that student passes from February onto June and prove to their teacher they are capable of taking and passing the Regents exam). No one in academic policy can explain how this is fair because it is NOT fair and to me, unconscionable. I've been an educator for 15 years and I have seen 100s of students struggle at the beginning of the year only to finish strong and pass their class and the Regents.

Students that fail courses in semester schools need to make up the courses anyway, whether in the summer or the following school year. Why penalize them twice during a pandemic by not giving them the same opportunity as annualized schools?

Thank you for considering my question and for all the amazing work you do for the community.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for another opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Jeanne Houck, and I am the Executive Director for the Creative Arts Team at CUNY, serving all 51 Council Districts in New York City.

The mission of the Creative Arts Team (CAT) is to use theatre and interactive drama as a catalyst to address academic and social issues. Founded in 1974, CAT delivers programs that promote literacy, college and career readiness, social-emotional learning, violence prevention, conflict resolution, and arts learning. CAT works with over 18,000 New Yorkers at 180 schools and community sites annually, delivering programs to Pre-K-12th grade students and educators, college students, parents, and adults.

CAT has been trusted to deliver our culturally responsive, trauma-informed pedagogy at the height of the AIDS crisis and immediately after 9/11, and has continued to do so during the COVID-19 pandemic. CAT has adapted curricula to help meet the social-emotional and academic needs of students and educators due to COVID-19. CAT is currently delivering virtual programs to teachers, parents, public school students, and college students. Our educators and teaching artists are using virtual platforms to deliver asynchronous and live video dramas, lessons, and discussions that are as participant-centered as possible. CAT teaching artists are engaging students and adults in drama, history, arts, and literacy curricula, as well as facilitating workshops that explore topics including staying on track in your education, parenting and privacy during quarantine, managing boundaries, and bettering communication skills. We are continuing our college readiness programs with weekly residencies that support building skills in literacy and learning United States immigration history. CAT is also providing professional development for teachers on creative ways to use virtual tools to engage students in their academic studies.

Because of CAT’s participant-centered pedagogy and expertise in using theatre to facilitate conversations and strategies for processing loss and finding hope, we are joining arts and culture organizations throughout the city in using the arts as a tool for moving forward as a society and as citizens.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to continue to fuel a vibrant New York City, restore mental health for families, and engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

I respectfully request that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, and Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Our own organization’s capacity would be decreased by 50% or more without support from these agencies. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Houck, PhD

**Jeanne Houck, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**Chris Vine**  
Artistic & Education Advisor  
Academic Director,  
CUNY MA in Applied Theatre

**Advisory Council**

Stephen R. Aiello  
Elyse Buxbaum  
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Sandra A. Lamb  
Jack Lusk  
Nancy Walker

Lynda Zimmerman  
Founding Executive Director

Nancy F. Swartzell  
In Memoriam

**Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**  
**May 27, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Jeannine Kiely and I chair the Schools and Education Committee for Manhattan, Community Board 2.

This month, 242 parents and educators attended a joint Manhattan, CB 1 & 2 meeting on remote learning and they submitted 200 questions to our panel of six principals and senior staff to the DOE's Chief Academic Officer.

With this feedback, we unanimously passed resolutions with three broad recommendations:

1. Urge the DOE to incorporate a ***Hybrid Plan for Fall 2020*** that permits both remote and in-person learning and provides:
  - a. Clear policy for more live or synchronous instruction and prerecorded classes, more small group instruction, and increased feedback between students and teachers;
  - b. Teacher training, technology and time to increase uniformity of instruction within schools, within grades and across schools;
  - c. Guidelines for academic intervention and remediation and delivery of content beyond written material;
  - d. Best practices for teaching reading and writing that are science-based, systematic, explicit and multi-sensory;
  - e. In-school resources for social emotional and trauma support;
  - f. Resources to implement social distancing, cleaning and other safety measures; and,
  - g. Bolder strategies to ***reduce the digital divide*** so ***every student*** has access to a remote learning device and broadband, including laptops for middle and high school students and partnering with the private sector to make this happen;
2. Insist that the DOE communicate its fall plans, or range of plans, publicly as soon as possible and that each school communicate more frequently with parents and students, even if they simply say they don't know the answer. Parents appreciate this!
3. Implore that our city's leaders ***aggressively seek additional funding*** for our public schools, not cut Fair Student Funding, ***limit in-school budget cuts***, and instead cut non-essential contracts and central DOE spending.

Thank you.

Jeannine Kiely  
Chair, Schools and Education Committee  
Manhattan, Community Board 2  
[jeanninekiely@gmail.com](mailto:jeanninekiely@gmail.com)  
917-297-4475

Attachment  
CB 2 Resolutions, unanimously passed, May 21, 2020

**BWA**

*Boals, Winnett & Associates*  
A Talent & Literary Agency

262 W. 38th Street #1207 NYC 10018  
P: 212-500-1424  
E: info@boalswinnett.com

May 20,2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Jenna Winnett and I work as a talent agent at Boals, Winnett and Associates in Midtown Manhattan.

The mission of BWA is to support actors and writers and help them tell the stories that fuel our city and our nation. Our company has helped many up and coming actors find work in the Broadway and Off-Broadway community as well as the once flourishing TV and film industry of New York City. Many of our clients have developed their skills and the love of the performing arts right here in New York City. Without the programs that are provided by community arts programs many of the brightest and most talented actors, writers and artists would not be who they are today. Without those artists and storytellers New York City would not be the cultural epicenter of the US.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. These budget cuts would damage our company by not providing the training and outlets our clients need to grow and better themselves. Without that growth our company will not see revenue and our agency as well as many others throughout the city will be in trouble. The work we do brings joy and emotional stability to so many in New York City. Beyond that the work we do helps

bring essential tourism to our city. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Jenna Winnett

**BWA** | *Boals, Winnett & Associates*  
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## Remote Learning

City Council on Education Testimony, May 22, 2020

Jennifer Fox, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade parent, NEST+m

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While the intentions behind “asynchronous learning” are good, and well meant, the reality is that asynchronous learning is a disaster for students and for families.

Parents have been told that asynchronous learning is intended to allow parents the flexibility to assist students on their own time, but in fact, what it has led to is burdening parents with all of the teaching. Even an advanced third grader cannot simply read a slide show, listen to their teacher read the slide show, and head off to complete their assignments successfully. (..and never mind doing the typing!)

An eight year old doing their first research project needs guidance to learn how to take notes; they aren’t going to get it right the first time just by looking at a presentation. They need an adult to help them figure out how to pace their time to complete the assignment on time. When they get muddled up on a complex multi-part assignment, they need someone to recognize what’s happening, and provide the appropriate redirection.

In short, they need a teacher.

However, working parents, even if we’re working from home, are not teachers. We can’t do our jobs and also teach. Nor can we do our jobs all day then become teachers after our workday is done; by that time, kids need to get dinner and bedtime! And besides, what would the kids be doing all day? There is, frankly, no way of doing what asynchronous learning is asking of parents without detracting from our obligations to our jobs.

Frankly, my family is in a pretty good situation in that our jobs are somewhat flexible, we have only one learner, and she’s capable of / willing to work independently. If asynchronous learning is a disaster for us, what must it be like for families who aren’t quite so privileged as we?

Normally, public school parents expect kids to be in school at least from 8:20 to 2:40 every day. We have arranged our lives around that. This doesn’t necessarily accommodate everyone’s working life (indeed, unless you actually work for the DOE, it is 100% certain that public school hours and days off will *never* align with a parent’s work schedule!), however, this is something we have all figured out how to manage. Working parents, and the kids of working parents, should be able to rely on live, engaged teaching during these hours.

In order to keep this testimony short(ish), I am choosing to focus on the burden that the DOE policy of asynchronous learning places on families, and how it forces us to choose between our livelihood and our childrens’ education. There are many other significant issues with asynchronous learning, such as the lack of social interaction between peers, the lack of engaged peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and other social-emotional factors. The few opportunities our school has offered for live zoom learning with teachers and students have been a lifeline for my third grader and for us. In fact, we have tried to supplement these with some wonderful livestreamed lessons from the New York Historical Society and other museums and institutions. However, cultural institutions can supplement, but never replace, classroom learning.

Asynchronous learning means that parents are essentially being provided with a guided curriculum for homeschooling. Public school families and public school students need real time, live learning alongside their peers, taught by real-live teachers.



## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

29 May 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is jess pretty, and I work at Movement Research as a Dance Makers in the School teaching artist for University Neighborhood High School in the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

The mission of Movement Research is to create educational opportunities in which working dance artists teach children and share their own creative processes. Movement Research partners with each school to create a unique program that serves the school's specific needs. The teaching artists and classroom teachers together develop lesson plans for the appropriate age group, learning level and academic environment. Dance Makers in the Schools began in 1993 largely as a result of the initiative of individual artists and teachers. Starting in 2008, under the leadership of Executive Director Barbara Bryan, Movement Research prioritized enhancing the program and building stronger connections within the East Village/Lower East Side neighborhood among school and artist communities. Since 2008-09, the program has more than doubled in size; it has grown from annually serving roughly 195 students in 3 partner schools to over 475 students in 8 schools, as of 2015-16. In keeping with its mission statement, Movement Research has empowered individual artists and teachers to guide the growth of the program with their creativity, thoughtful inquiry and knowledge of the community.

Movement Research is now still offering classes online to these schools and students. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community

that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

jess pretty

I have been a NYC public school educator for the past 13 years in both traditional public schools and public charter schools. I have taught in the South Bronx, Brownsville, Canarsie and now work with schools in East New York as a History coach. When COVID-19 hit, it was not a surprise to me to see our teachers and leaders work tirelessly to ensure that there was a remote learning plan in place for our students. I was not surprised because that is always what passionate educators do they find solutions to take care of our students.

However, the impact of this pandemic has hit our students of color in low income neighborhoods the hardest. They are in live zoom sessions of 90 kids to a room, lacking the attention and feedback they deserve. This was our best solution given that many of our teachers have children of their own and were not able to teach multiple sections of students. We were passing out laptops the days before our schools shut down and calling every family to make sure students had the internet. Our students are overwhelmed with stress since they live in NYCHA housing and are worried about family members in close proximity to one another getting sick. I have students who will complete their classwork late in the evening because they are watching their siblings during the day while their parents work multiple essential jobs. Students who have lost their grandparents, and parents and are worried about funeral costs. Students who can't visit the colleges they were accepted to and aren't sure what life decisions to make. They like all NYC students are sad to miss their proms, graduations, and the social life with their peers. Despite all of this, kids are resilient and my students don't complain about what they are missing- they point out that it is for the good of NYC, that they are grateful for their communities, that we should be glad that carbon emissions are going down. Our students are resilient and believe that the adults will take care of them and things will get better. We the adults need to ensure that is the case.

Prior to the pandemic I worked in a high school where 80% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, 100% of students were students of color and 100% of the seniors were accepted to college. There were two social workers for 500 students and three college counselors. Teachers came to school on Saturdays to teach SAT and AP review prep sessions, we helped our students write their personal statements, I wrote 30 letters of recommendation and I worked 12 hour days. All of that time and energy and extra work without extra pay is worth it. I had a student Demarre get up before school to go vote in the midterm elections and then made it to school on time. I had a student Nicole text me in August with her Vassar dorm room set up excited to take her first French class. One of my students Jason is the first in his family to go to college in the United States he is currently the only student of color in Brown's accelerated medical school program. I watched my students achieve incredible goals with very little resources. Our teachers can't work harder than they already are working. Our students can't achieve more with even less. You can't cut the special education teacher that made Demarre want to get to 1<sup>st</sup> period on time, or the Spanish educator who made Nicole fall in love with languages or the college counselor who told Jason that Brown had an accelerated med school program and stayed after school to fill out his FAFSA form with him. Our students already operate in a segregated system that gives them less we can't continue to make cuts to communities who were suffering from inequity long before this pandemic began. Every child deserves a social worker to talk to about the family member they lost during COVID-19, a hot meal to eat, a computer to work on, a safe building with supplies to walk into, a teacher to give them feedback on their work, a college advisor to help them decide where to live out their

dreams. Our kids deserve even more than those basics but lets ensure that in these hard times we will keep their hearts, minds and bodies safe.

Jillian Gaeta

Impact of COVID-19 at KIPP NYC Schools Testimony  
May 27<sup>th</sup> 2020

My name is Jim Manly and I am the superintendent at KIPP NYC Schools. We currently educate and collaborate with 7,894 students and their families throughout 15 schools in the neighborhoods of the South Bronx, Washington Heights, Harlem and Crown Heights.

These times have tested us and our resolve. We know more challenges are yet to come and the road ahead may be just as hard, or harder, than the one we have traveled since our buildings closed. All of us know someone who is sick. We are worried about them and we are worried about our city. The divisions that separate our country into socioeconomic tiers are being exposed in a way that we all recognize, but in even greater relief as suffering is not equally distributed in this crisis.

When we went into remote learning, we listened to our families and tried to fill gaps where we could. We started a family assistance fund, distributed over 3,216 chrome books and hotspot devices and started a community pantry where our families can come and grab a week's worth of food. When we saw that our families in Harlem needed easier access, our principals stepped in and made food distribution available in front of our now-closed school building. We became aware of the mental burden that this transition had and stepped in to coaching families on how to navigate the technology, calling our families individually to ensure parents feel supported as they juggle their child's education, their own work and making lunch. After several weeks of remote learning, we shared a Parent and student survey to figure out what is going well and what we can improve.

This is bigger than just a school building, we have to build on to our families' lives by supporting and improving essential aspects of our communities, such as NYCHA, shelters, small businesses and hospitals.

We know that even after NYC re-opens, the disparities that our families have been exposed to will continue to make themselves felt more deeply and longer than anyone should have to bear. We remain hopeful that the City Council will make the right decisions to ameliorate obstacles felt by our children and their families.

Sincerely,  
Jim Manly  
Superintendent  
KIPP NYC Schools

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Interim Commissioner Shannon Tahoe  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12234

May 4, 2020

Dear Interim Commissioner Tahoe:

We write today to share our serious and growing concerns about internet access and privacy protections for children participating in remote learning. The NYCLU, the New York State affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with eight chapters and regional offices and more than 200,000 members and supporters across the state. Our mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles, rights and constitutional values embodied in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of the State of New York.



125 Broad St. 19<sup>th</sup> Fl.  
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Donna Lieberman  
*Executive Director*

Robin Willner  
*President*

We have a long history of vigorously defending students' rights, including access to education and privacy rights. As a member of the Data Privacy Advisory Council established by the New York State Education Department ("NYSED"), and through our leading work to address concerns with regard to the use of face surveillance in New York schools, our commitment is that civil liberties are enhanced rather than compromised by technological innovation.

Over the past several weeks, the NYCLU has collected more than 500 survey responses from across the state regarding New Yorkers' experiences with remote learning during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.<sup>1</sup> We write to you to share some of our findings and urge action to ensure: (1) that all students have equal access to the various technologies that make effective remote learning possible, and (2) that adequate and uniform privacy safeguards are in place to protect students when they are engaged in remote learning.

Unfortunately, our survey findings confirm what we expected: inequalities are exacerbated during times of crisis. Students from low income families, students of color, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, immigrant students, undocumented students, and students who lack permanent housing are disproportionately facing barriers to remote learning, such as lack of access to remote learning devices and the internet, insufficient transportation to pick up paper packets of school work, language barriers when navigating technology and remote learning instruction, the discontinuation of special education services, and more. Every day that these issues go unaddressed, students become more disconnected from their school communities and lose critical social and emotional support and academic instruction.

While New York State has risen to the urgent and unprecedented challenge of remote learning, it is vital that solutions – which may become long-term – are designed to meet these interconnected goals: providing every student access to a quality education while also protecting their privacy. As NYSED works swiftly to narrow the digital divide

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<sup>1</sup> Education & Related Services in New York State During the Coronavirus Outbreak, [https://www.papersurvey.io/s/n\\_y\\_c\\_l\\_u\\_education](https://www.papersurvey.io/s/n_y_c_l_u_education).

and ensure access to remote learning for every student, it must also ensure adherence to students' right to privacy.

### Inequitable Access to Technology

Remote learning is not sufficient unless all students have access to the tools they need to participate fully and equitably. School district plans for conducting remote learning must include:

- Computers or tablets, with built-in or external webcams and microphones, for every student in the household;
- Internet access that is fast and reliable enough for learning via remote video;
- Hardware and related capabilities needed for high-speed internet access;
- Free access to all necessary secure remote learning and communications platforms and applications, and reliable assistance with setting them up and troubleshooting;
- Assistive technology, including hardware (such as screen readers), software, and websites that comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Levels AA accessibility standards<sup>2</sup>, so students with disabilities can fully participate in remote learning; and
- For all of the above, providing plain language materials and content in the parent/guardian's native language so that families understand and are able to use the remote learning technology tools provided by schools and their education partners.

For students with disabilities, access to technology is a critical tool for districts to continue to fulfill obligations to provide a free appropriate public education ("FAPE")<sup>3</sup> and the mandates of individualized education programs ("IEP"). Technology like videoconferencing must be used to provide services and supports, including one-on-one support and curricular modifications, speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy, mental health services, and sign language interpreters. And it can and should be used to conduct remote meetings of IEP and 504 teams with parental participation.

Getting each child an appropriate remote learning device is an enormous task that necessitates making available existing state funds and pursuing support outside of the State's own resources. Schools across New York State distributed remote learning devices to families only to discover that families could not access the internet, did not have enough devices for all children in the home to access all of their instruction, or the tablets did not

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<sup>2</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160. For more information on how to comply with WCAG 2.0 AA, see [https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/?currentsidebar=%23col\\_customize&versions=2.0](https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/?currentsidebar=%23col_customize&versions=2.0).

<sup>3</sup> The state's obligation to ensure that students with disabilities receive a FAPE, including through specialized services as required by IEP or 504 plans, is not suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. See Department of Education, Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak (March 2020), <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/qa-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>.

have the capability to run remote learning platforms for general education and special education services.<sup>4</sup>

New York’s Smart Schools Bond Act provides a ready source of funding to use for remote learning solutions. NYSED, along with other members of the Smart Schools Review Board, should fast-track school district applications for funds to be used for remote learning technology equipment, including laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots and tablets.<sup>5</sup> In addition to state funds, the United States Department of Education (“USDOE”) is making nearly \$3 billion available in grants to help states “address student needs arising from the COVID-19 related disruption of the current academic year”<sup>6</sup> through its Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund.<sup>7</sup> The USDOE has also created a \$13.2 billion Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to provide “local educational agencies... with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.”<sup>8</sup> Grant funds like these should be vigorously pursued and used to help close the technology gaps.

With respect to private industry, NYSED should immediately call on computer hardware, software, Internet Service Providers (“ISP”), and EdTech companies to help provide the above-listed technologies to schools still in need of devices, for free or on loan, so they can be distributed to students in need.

In the case of services like internet access, those can and should be provided directly to students for free until the COVID-19 crisis subsides.<sup>9</sup> New York’s government must play a role in the provision of broadband services. Offers of free internet by private providers presented additional barriers to families who were initially denied this service due to outstanding fees owed.<sup>10</sup> Rural families have struggled with limited access to broadband, with students using school buses as hotspots.<sup>11</sup> And undocumented families



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<sup>4</sup> Alarming, some schools filed complaints with child welfare agencies alleging educational neglect, after there were delays in obtaining free devices or children failed to sign into online classes. Eileen Grench, *Parents Expecting iPad Deliveries Got Knock on Door From Child Welfare Workers*, The City, April 28, 2020, <https://thecity.nyc/2020/04/some-parents-awaiting-ipads-got-visit-from-child-welfare.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Smart Schools Bond Act Implementation Guidance, [http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/documents/SSBAGuidancerev\\_10\\_24\\_18\\_Final.pdf](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/documents/SSBAGuidancerev_10_24_18_Final.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Notice Announcing Availability of Funds and Deadline for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER Fund); Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/04/GEER-Notice-of-Funds-1.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund, <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/governors-emergency-education-relief-fund/>.

<sup>8</sup> Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/>.

<sup>9</sup> Where school districts or other government agencies partner with companies in the private sector to make remote learning technologies available to students, NYSED should publish these agreements online or make them publicly available so as to educate the public on supports they can access during remote learning periods, in compliance with Education Law § 2-d.

<sup>10</sup> Reema Amin, *Internet service providers blocked NYC families with unpaid bills from remote learning deals. De Blasio plans to crack down.*, Chalkbeat, March 26, 2020, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/3/26/21225367/internet-service-providers-blocked-nyc-families-with-unpaid-bills-from-remote-learning-deals-de-blas>.

<sup>11</sup> Danielle Muoio, Nick Nidzwadek, and Marie J. French, *Rural areas struggle with remote learning as broadband remains elusive*, Politico New York, April 22, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/states/new->



without internet may be wary of providing their contact information to ISPs and may be unable to take advantage of free internet offers if they are not provided in the parent/guardian’s native language. Now more than ever, it is clear that the internet is a public utility and states must not rely solely on an inequitable patchwork of private internet service providers.<sup>12</sup>

We strongly urge you to tap into every available resource, including federal funding and the private sector, to address the technological inequities in remote learning.

### Lack of Privacy

Many of the technologies needed for remote learning, including hardware, software, internet services, and educational learning platforms, are capable of collecting massive amounts of private, personal information from students and spying on them using surveillance technologies. In fact, for some “free” platforms, collecting and even selling user data is an integral part of the business model. Students must not be required to consent to being spied upon or surrender their privacy as a condition of receiving a remote education during the COVID-19 crisis.

It is important to note that for some students and their families, privacy is not just a preference; it is a necessity. Undocumented and immigrant students may feel the need to forego the use of educational technologies and services if they believe the technology’s information gathering or surveillance capabilities will place them and their families at risk. All students must feel safe to learn remotely, and that simply cannot happen if the tools used for remote learning are allowed to collect information to generate future income or for other non-instructional purposes.<sup>13</sup>

To that end, in addition to ensuring all students have full and equitable access to remote learning, NYSED and school districts must ensure every remote learning tool used by students fully protects their privacy and that of their families. Based on our survey results, students across New York are using a number of different platforms including Zoom<sup>14</sup>, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, Seesaw, Edpuzzle, Flipgrid,

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[york/albany/story/2020/04/22/rural-areas-struggle-with-remote-learning-as-broadband-remains-elusive-1278788](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/rural-areas-struggle-with-remote-learning-as-broadband-remains-elusive-1278788).

<sup>12</sup> These providers also must respect our constitutional values of free speech and privacy and codify necessary protections as part of any rollout. See JAY STANLEY, *The Public Internet Option - How Local Governments Can Provide Network Neutrality, Privacy, and Access for All* (2018), <https://www.aclu.org/report/public-internet-option>.

<sup>13</sup> The use of student personally identifiable information for financial gain would also directly violate New York State’s student privacy law, Education Law § 2-d. N.Y. Educ. Law § 2-d(3)(b)(1) (“(1) A student’s personally identifiable information cannot be sold or released for any commercial purposes.”); 8 NYCRR § 121.2(a) (“Educational agencies shall not sell personally identifiable information nor use or disclose it for any marketing or commercial purpose or facilitate its use or disclosure by any other party for any marketing or commercial purpose or permit another party to do so.”).

<sup>14</sup> After learning of countless privacy and security concerns, the New York City Department of Education banned the use of Zoom for remote learning. Alex Zimmerman, *NYC forbids schools from using Zoom for remote learning due to privacy and security concerns*, Chalkbeat, April 5, 2020, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/4/21225416/nyc-forbids-schools-from-using-zoom-for-remote-learning-due-to-privacy-and-security-concerns>.



Schoology, WebEx, Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, and ClassDojo, among others. Each platform has its own unique features and settings, which may be difficult for families to navigate. NYSED must review the use of each of these tools and their myriad privacy policies to ensure compliance with Education Law §2-d and its student data privacy protections, as well as the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act<sup>15</sup> and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act.<sup>16</sup> NYSED should not leave the protection of student privacy up to overburdened school districts attempting to provide high-quality remote instruction.

Specifically, NYSED should mandate that all contracts and agreements governing products and services used for remote learning, whether they are provided to the government or directly to students and their families, include the following enforceable requirements, in addition to those already mandated by New York law:

1. All computer hardware, software, ISP, and EdTech companies that provide or sell any of the above-listed remote learning technologies should be prohibited from collecting, using, and retaining any private, personal information (including, but not limited to personally identifiable information (“PII”)) about a student or their family members unless doing so is directly necessary for their platforms’ remote learning functionality. Moreover, these companies should be required to promptly expunge all the PII and any other information they gather, generate, or derive from the use of these technologies during this health crisis when it resolves, unless a student’s parent or legal guardian specifically opts-in to it being retained (via a clear, post-crisis request, and not as part of a broad user agreement they sign now under pressure). None of this data should be shared with third parties unless directly required for the provision and functioning of the service.
2. All computer hardware, software, ISP, and EdTech companies who provide or sell any of above-listed remote learning technologies should be required to remove or permanently disable any surveillance functions that accompany their products and services, including communications and social media monitoring, search term and browsing history monitoring, keyword alerts, surreptitious access capabilities including video and audio surveillance, keyloggers, location tracking, facial recognition and other biometric identifying capabilities, and web filtering functions. Students and their families need these technologies to learn at home, not to enable companies and school districts to spy on them.
3. To ensure the computer hardware, software, ISP, and EdTech companies abide by these mandates, each should be required to consent to NYSED audits of their compliance with the above privacy conditions. These audits



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<sup>15</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. Part 99.

<sup>16</sup> 15 U.S.C. § 6501; 16 C.F.R. Part 312.

should also encompass compliance with Education Law § 2-d, including the provisions regarding the publication of supplements to the parent bill of rights for each contract or agreement with a third-party contractor.<sup>17</sup>

While the aforementioned privacy protections should be applicable to student information whether we are in the midst of a public health crisis or not, at a minimum, they should be made mandatory while the use of remote learning tools is, for all practical purposes, compulsory.

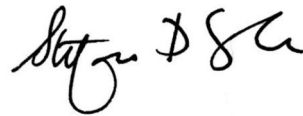
The COVID-19 public health crisis has catapulted us all into uncharted territory. As New York State creates its remote learning infrastructure, there is an opportunity to build a strong and equitable digital foundation that will affirm students' rights in this moment and prepare us for the increasingly digital future ahead. To follow up with questions or to schedule a meeting, please contact Johanna Miller at [jmiller@nyclu.org](mailto:jmiller@nyclu.org).



Sincerely,



Johanna E. Miller, Esq.  
Director  
Education Policy Center



Stefanie D. Coyle, Esq.  
Deputy Director  
Education Policy Center

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<sup>17</sup> 8 NYCRR 121.3(d).

Joshwald Martinez-Peralta

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

5/27/2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Joshwald Martinez-Peralta, and I work at People's Theatre Project in Upper Manhattan.

People's Theatre Project is a social justice arts organization that creates ensemble-based theatre with and for immigrant communities to develop the next generation of diverse, socially-engaged artists and leaders. Through our programmatic cycle, PTP participants deepen their sense of power, strengthen their connection to community, and develop the skills to become the next generation of creative, collaborative and compassionate civic artists. Just last year we worked with 25 school and community partners, over 1,000 young artists Uptown, and presented their original work to over 2,500 NYC residents. We work with the families whose loved ones worked through the uncertain nightmare before the city began to flatten the curve and who continue to innovate their survival.

We have continued to hold virtual theatre classes in our partner schools; held two festivals of original, youth ensemble work adapted to Zoom thanks to the genius of our Teaching Artists; launched a world premiere virtual-theatre performance to encourage our immediate community to count themselves in the Census; we've launched a new weekly broadcast highlighting survival resources and the beauty of Uptown's familial resilience, and we've even established a relief fund to support our neediest young artists' families.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a

place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. The planned cuts would limit the capacity of arts education organizations citywide to nurture the creativity young people so desperately need to cultivate in order to imagine a world better than the one we've found ourselves in. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Joshwald Martinez-Peralta



Members of the Committee on Education:

My name is Jyoti Laverack. I am a high school junior and a member of the Service Learning Project (SLP) Youth Board. SLP is a New York City-based civic engagement program for youth in grades K-12. Through our school day and after-school programs, youth become agents of change, learning through the process that civic engagement is essential to an effective and equitable democracy. Through the experience, young people of all ages develop critical academic, social, and emotional skills and- more importantly - learn to see themselves as leaders with the ability and responsibility to improve their schools and neighborhoods.

Our Youth Board, consisting of five teenagers from various NYC public schools, advocates for culturally responsive action-civics education for all NYC students. Our goal is for students to have access to hands-on civics education that provides opportunities for young people to initiate change on the issues they care most about. Our recent survey of NYC high school students proves both the need and demand for action civics: 37% said they don't know enough about the government to make a change in their community. 90% say that they would like a class in school which teaches them to be engaged citizens. And the number of students who agreed they could make a positive change increased by 31% when their school offered civics as part of the curriculum. Of course, this percentage would be even higher if the DOE could regulate the quality of civics education which students receive. We believe this will create generations of diverse, engaged citizens and changemakers.

Below we outline our current goals and the outcomes we would expect to see:

SLP Youth Board's Current Goals:

1. Implement a culturally responsive curriculum in all schools which expands beyond the usually Eurocentric Regents curriculum. This means that the curriculum will ensure representation of all cultures, whether it be through books, media, or lessons.
2. Implement a teacher diversity quota while ensuring qualified, trained staff in schools.

3. Implement a civics education requirement for all students which they must complete in order to graduate. Instead of a test as the checkpoint, all students must complete a hands-on final project in their community.
4. Require voter registration for all high school seniors and provide support.

Outcomes We Expect to See:

1. If students see themselves more represented in their curriculum, they will feel like an active participant in their history. Students will therefore be more engaged and motivated in class, hopefully contributing to closing the opportunity gap.
2. If students see themselves represented by their teachers, they will also feel more engaged in the classroom. They will be offered role models who they physically relate to from a young age.
3. All students will develop passion for social issues and more importantly, know how to make their voice heard. Students will feel confident in their knowledge of the government and how to communicate with their representatives.
4. All students will have been educated on the importance of voting and the weight of their own voice. With support for voter registration, all high school seniors will be set up for a lifetime of civic engagement.

As important as these issues were before the COVID-19 pandemic, the exigent need for educational equity and civics education has only intensified. With the overwhelming overflow of false information and heightening institutional inequalities, now more than ever, we need to equip the future generation of students to feel confident as independent thinkers, voters, and changemakers. Thank you for this opportunity to advocate for these critical resources for NYC students.

All the best,  
Jyoti Laverack and the members of the SLP Youth Board

jyoticherellis@gmail.com  
718-675-6498

Kara Matthews, Director of Development  
Children's Museum of the Arts

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
5/28/2020



Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education in New York City. My name is Kara Matthews, and I work at Children's Museum of the Arts (CMA) in Hudson Square.

The mission of CMA is to introduce children and their families to the transformative power of the arts by providing opportunities to make art side-by-side with working artists. CMA's core activities have consisted of on-site public programming with interactive art stations and artist-led workshops for children; as well as school and community outreach programs that take place at CMA and throughout New York City, providing free arts education to underserved children. At our main location, we have exhibited world-class contemporary artists alongside artwork by children from our permanent collection. We have recently launched our digital classroom, which offers the opportunity to serve our largest and most diverse audience by far.

CMA has long held the goal of developing online classrooms, and the current COVID-19 crisis has amplified the need for such resources for our audience. We were of course required to temporarily close our physical location, while at the same time, our parent community was thrust into home-schooling their children with little preparation or experience. CMA has responded immediately by developing online learning opportunities, in the form of online classes and pre-recorded workshops that families can opt into at any time. We hear from our families consistently that they rely on these resources. Beyond the pandemic, community arts experiences are going to be vital for healing, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. CMA stands ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, and community-based organizations to continue to bring arts education to our children, whether the next fiscal year brings in-person or remote learning opportunities (or a hybrid.) We hope that we can count on New York City to sustain funding for our work.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed,



programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Kara Matthews



**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Anna Arkin-Gallagher – Supervising Attorney, Education Practice**

***BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES***

**Presented Before**

**The New York City Council Committee on Education**

**Oversight Hearing on Remote Learning – The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City’s Schools**

**May 27, 2020**

My name is Anna Arkin-Gallagher. I am a Supervising Attorney in the Education Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) provides innovative, multi-disciplinary, and client-centered criminal, family, and immigration defense, as well as civil legal services for over 30,000 people in Brooklyn every year. We thank the City Council Committee on Education and Chair Treyger for holding this important hearing on remote learning and the impact of COVID-19 on New York City’s schools.

BDS’s Education Unit delivers legal representation and informal advocacy to our school-age clients and to parents of children in New York City schools. Many of the people we serve are involved in the criminal legal or child welfare systems. In addition, a significant number of the students we work with qualify as “over-age and under-credited” and have been retained at least one grade. More than half of the students we work with are classified as students with disabilities. As an interdisciplinary legal and social work team, we work to improve our clients’ access to education and a significant portion of our advocacy relates to special education, school discipline, reentry and alternative pathways to graduation.

Transitioning a school system of 1.1 million students to remote learning has been a monumental effort. Our unit has seen teachers, paraprofessionals, and school administrators work long hours to ensure that students can access some semblance of a traditional education during this extraordinary time. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned that the Department of Education’s remote learning program threatens to exacerbate the many inequities that have long existed within the City’s education system.

## **DOE Must Provide Adequate Mental Health and Behavioral Supports for Those Most Affected by COVID-19.**

At the start of the pandemic, many of the families we have been working with lacked access to the technology required to access the DOE's remote learning platforms. Even after waiting sometimes weeks to secure internet-connected devices, these families have continued to struggle with slow internet connections, the lack of private space in crowded apartments or shelters, and other logistical challenges.

These challenges, moreover, come on top of tumultuous circumstances produced by the pandemic, as many families struggling to access remote-learning platforms are at the same time experiencing profound trauma borne from job losses, financial insecurities, and the deaths of close family members and friends. Many of the families we work with have described serious challenges in encouraging and facilitating school engagement, particularly with older students.

With all this in mind, we believe that the DOE must formulate a plan that helps to provide adequate mental health and behavioral support services to students, and to ensure that schools are well-positioned to address the trauma that students and staff have suffered. A comprehensive plan to provide these services would require additional resources from the City, and we appreciate the work that this Committee has done to ensure that additional social workers were brought into DOE schools for the current school year even before this pandemic. It is essential that schools have intensive and proactive support services in place, not just during this period of remote learning, but also when students return—in whatever form—to school buildings.

## **The DOE Should Work with Parents and Caregivers to Keep ACS and the NYPD Out of Remote Learning.**

We cannot overstate the extent of the harm that flows from unnecessary and invasive child welfare involvement for poor families and families of color. Since New York City families began to experience the challenges of this pandemic, parents and other caregivers that we represent have experienced new Administration for Children's Services (ACS) involvement because of remote learning delays and challenges. We have confronted instances in which schools call ACS or the State Central Register (SCR) upon noticing that students have not logged into the remote learning platform, even when these absences resulted from missing or delayed devices, technological difficulties, and internet connectivity issues. We have become aware of at least one situation in which the school called ACS to report suspected educational neglect, even after speaking with the parent who confirmed that the student was logging into remote learning daily and completing all of his coursework, but was simply having difficulty submitting that work to the teacher due to a technological issue.

We have also found that schools are making reports to ACS or SCR even after working with the family to come up with an alternative plan to remote learning. In one instance, our client worked with the school to develop a plan for sending paper packets for the student to work on at home. However, despite knowing that the student was participating in this alternate plan, the school continued to mark the student as "absent" and eventually made a report of suspected neglect to the

SCR. In another case, our client informed the school that she was having internet connectivity issues and that her child was still waiting for a DOE-issued data-enabled device. The school made a report to the SCR anyway, and our client has already received a letter from the Office of Children and Family Services stating that the case called in by the school had been “indicated,” which may have serious negative employment consequences for our client and requires her to affirmatively challenge this determination and ask that OCFS amend and seal this report.

We also have concerns that “absences” due to remote learning are inviting other kinds of unnecessary surveillance of and intervention in families’ lives. It is our understanding that schools have sometimes been encouraged to contact the New York Police Department (NYPD) to perform “wellness checks” of students who have struggled to access remote learning services. We are aware of at least one case in which the NYPD investigated a family even after a parent informed the school that the child was medically unable to participate in remote learning. Visits from the police for this purpose are invasive, unsafe, and unnecessary, especially during this time of social distancing.

We ask that the City Council work with the DOE to eliminate these intrusive and punitive practices. We hope that the Council will consider the impact that ACS and police visits have on poor families and families of color and encourage the DOE to act as a partner with parents and caregivers who are trying to adjust to the challenges of this pandemic. During this time when New York City families are cut off from many other systems of support, teachers and school staff who already know and work with parents, caregivers, and students are in the best position to assess barriers to engagement with remote learning and directly support and counsel families without involving other government agencies.

### **Education in Jails and Detention Facilities**

School-age young people in city jails and juvenile detention facilities have the right to receive educational services. However, during this pandemic, they have been especially ill-served by remote learning.

Students at the Crossroads and Horizon facilities have had no access to synchronous learning, and only minimal access to any kind of teacher interaction. Up until last week, students at these facilities were only able to communicate with education staff by leaving notes for their teachers in the learning software. Students now can communicate with teachers only through a phone hotline.

Students on Rikers Island went weeks without receiving any educational services whatsoever. As of last week, paper packets were supposed to be distributed to students across facilities at Rikers, but these students still lack the ability to communicate with teachers or other educational staff to get any support with their learning. We have heard from many young people who—locked into their housing units with no access to programming—are eager to use this opportunity to earn some high school credits or make progress towards earning their high school equivalency diplomas, but have been unable to do so.

Therefore, as plans are made to continue with remote learning and eventually to resume in-person learning, it is essential that DOE prioritize the delivery of services to students in jails and detention facilities, so that these students can receive the education that they are entitled to.

### **Conclusion**

We recognize that DOE has undertaken extraordinary efforts to confront an extraordinary time. But we should all insist that DOE strive to tailor these efforts to address the needs of *all* students within the school system. Otherwise, the already gaping inequalities that exist within the system will only become more severe.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critically important topic. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [aarkingallagher@bds.org](mailto:aarkingallagher@bds.org) or (646) 971-2719.

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 21, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Katie Palmer and I work with five arts education companies. I travel each week to Inwood in Manhattan, Park Slope in Brooklyn, Pomonak in Queens and Bay Terrace in Staten Island to teach Music, Dance and Musical Theater in public elementary schools.

I have been a Teaching Artist working in countless NYC neighborhoods for six years. I love my job and the opportunities it provides the students with whom I work. When I start my residency at PS 200Q, some Pre-K students are hesitant while others jump fully into the dance class. But each week they all are growing - some will present their first solo and some will learn to take turns and follow others. Each child is becoming uniquely and creatively themselves through the performing arts and it is deep joy and responsibly to create the space for them to shine.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Katie Palmer



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Hoboken, NJ 07030  
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917-727-6875  
[www.dancelaughlearn.org](http://www.dancelaughlearn.org)

## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council May 23, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. Our names are Kerri Langan and Rylee Coppel. We are the co-creators of Dance.Laugh.Learn., a music, movement, and drama program that services New York City and the metro NY area.

Dance.Laugh.Learn. teaching artists go directly into daycares, preschools, after school programs, and summer camps to hold classes. We often see our students once a week, but that frequency depends on the facility. We are booked directly through schools and educational institutions. Our NYC clients include schools located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, and we work with many 3-K and UPK classes. In fact, we have students in both Coney Island and the South Bronx, two of the hardest hit areas in the COVID crisis.

We believe in the power of our program. Dance and movement help to develop fine and gross motor skills in young children. Connecting to imagination helps children build resilience and

creativity. Learning to sing literally helps children find their voice and grow in confidence. We believe that participating in the performing arts has an immense impact on the development of children, and the facilities that book us support this positive impact.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

We cannot wait for the day when it is safe to see our students again, when in-person schooling resumes. Yet, knowing that day could be in jeopardy due to budget cuts is devastating. Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York “where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs” a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Our youngest children need the support of the arts. Indeed, programs



that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Kerri Langan & Rylee Coppel  
Owners, Dance.Laugh.Learn.LLC



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 27, 2020

As New York City recovers from the COVID-19 crisis over the coming months and years, the arts and culture community will play a crucial role in the recovery of schools and communities. In allocating cuts and resources, the City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.

The New York City Arts in Education Roundtable is a service organization whose core purpose is to elevate, enhance, and sustain the work of the arts education community in New York City's schools and beyond. We are a community of organizations and educators that shares resources, provides professional development, and advocates for the needs of our members and the communities they serve. Our work lies at the intersection of culture, education, and community and occurs in over 1,290 public schools, in every neighborhood, and in all five boroughs.

Arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on our students or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city.

As you go about your duties, please remember that #ARTSareEssential and that arts experiences #buildCOMMUNITIES. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Sobha Kavanakudiyil, Board Co-Chair  
Jennifer DiBella, Board Co-Chair  
Kimberly Olsen, Managing Director  
Rachel Watts, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
David King, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable

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**Testimony of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at  
New York University  
before  
The New York City Council Committee on Education**

**May 27, 2020**

Good Morning Chairperson Treyger and all Council Members present. My name is Dr. Frank Pignatosi, and I am Clinical Assistant Professor at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and share my expertise on the topic of the impact of COVID-19 on New York City schools.

At NYU Steinhardt, the Teacher Education Council and the Office of Field Studies have been discussing what preK-12 instruction might become in light of the COVID-19 challenge since the first rumors of school closings. While we certainly wonder how this will impact the teacher education programs at NYU Steinhardt, we think it more important to explore how NYU as an institution (along with other NYC teacher education programs) can partner with the City and the NYCDOE to support learning and teaching in our communities in the coming fall. We feel this should be a city-wide effort and focus more on supporting the learning of PreK-12 students in diverse educational settings and then align the experiences of our pre-service candidates accordingly, rather than seek ways to allow these candidates to satisfy clinical requirements in the new normal.

For this to occur, we think it important to coordinate with the NYCDOE and the districts, and not with single schools. Our challenge is to rethink the model and move away from one that sees the NYCDOE and teacher education programs as entities that simply shuffle candidates from pre-service status to in-service status, each contributing to the education of pre-service teachers and to the PreK-12 school population, but rarely doing it collaboratively in the same space. More than ever, we feel that the onus of the partnership should become the opportunity for the partnership to address this new challenge and ensure equity of access to learning in a greater range of communities than before. This is not solely about supporting a single teacher in a physical or virtual classroom; it is about teams of educators working together to engage all learners in schools and communities. NYU, and many other teacher education programs, prepares candidates to teach in a variety of subject areas and to educate in a variety of school-based roles (Speech Pathology, Counseling, Nutrition, etc.) Considering the significant cuts in the NYC and NYCDOE budgets, and the related hiring freeze for new teachers in the fall, the NYCDOE should really consider how university programs could collaborate with the DOE to support student academic learning, at-home learning experiences with families, and socio-emotional learning.

Only a few weeks ago, NYU Steinhardt held a partnership event that brought together over 90 educators from different schools, community-based educational settings, other teacher education programs, and a representative from the NYS Board of Regents. We came away with the confirmation of shared challenges and the appreciation of schools for continued support from teacher education programs. The range of success stories and of struggles involving pre-service candidates in teaching, counseling, etc. was quite wide, as expected. Individual schools/sites have expressed interest in working in a variety of ways, depending on what the fall will look like, even if they do not know what the fall will look like. While there were many



creative solutions shared by different partners, guaranteed access in all schools to Google Classroom was a challenge, and relied too much on individual efforts. The range of success and struggle had a lot to do with the relationship built with the mentor teachers (i.e., some teachers gave students time and access outside of the formal time while others did or could not) and decisions by administrators on the inclusion of the student teachers. Even after the end of our academic year, some of our pre-service candidates are continuing to work with their partner schools, their students, and the families of those students.

While we remain dedicated to ensuring that our program will comply with State requirements, our current priority is to explore how we can support the learning of school populations, especially within the DOE system. Whether schools return to in-person instruction, opt for distance learning, or choose a hybrid of the two, we wish to collaborate with and support the NYCDOE. We are prepared to ask schools how cohorts of NYU student teachers could support their needs in and out of classrooms, rather than start from the student teacher/mentor teacher ratio. In other words, what can we do to support their efforts to ensure greater equity in access to distance learning rather than how many student teachers can you host? To achieve any of this, there are organizational needs to address - such as teacher-level access to Google Classroom - to ensure best access, and to avoid university candidates satisfying only clerical needs.

We also could offer to support existing distance-learning experiences with our students working with school educators to enable focused small-group instruction in asynchronous and synchronous modes (e.g., special education majors supporting individualization and differentiation of students with IEPs in smaller environments; targeted support for multilingual learners; science majors supporting online simulations with small groups in lieu of live labs; music majors leading break-out sessions in instrumental and vocal practice, etc., guided interactive read-alouds; math sessions with online manipulatives, etc.) We are ready to support the inclusion of students with disabilities and language needs in daily instruction.

We are also happy to co-craft, with school/district leaders, distance-learning experiences where our students and faculty collaborate with teachers to create PreK-12 learning through outside-of-classroom virtual sessions. This would build upon faculty expertise and experience with online tools and software. This effort could exist even if schools return to live instruction as a means of enrichment of the in-school learning.

Finally, we are very concerned about supporting home communities in the learning process. NYU Steinhardt has built a website of learning resources for families and communities, with the input of faculty, students, and educational partners. This includes resources to support families in the learning process, how-to guides for families as they lead learning at home, and culturally-relevant and multilingual materials. We have invited our partners to share with us specific needs they had so that we can continue to explore crafting specific responses to those very needs.

We think it is time to organize a wider collaborative effort to use our resources to help bridge the equity gaps across home communities, rather than serving individual schools or classrooms.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any additional questions the Committees may have. (Please contact Konstantine Tettonis, NYU Government Affairs, kt1249@nyu.edu.)

Hello,

My name is Kristina Agbebiyi and I am a macro social worker working at a Brooklyn nonprofit that serves as an “alternative incarceration.” Every day at work and through my personal organizing I interact with and build relationships with people who are harmed daily by the systems of capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, and homophobia. These are people who are already oppressed by structures of oppression. This oppression is magnified due to NY local politics, where budgets are passed without any reflection on the needs of New York’s working class, but instead center the needs of developers, millionaires, and anyone white. During the midst of a pandemic, NY needs to divest from policing, ticketing, and other forms of policing, and instead invest in education, public health, public and affordable housing, and options for addressing interpersonal harm. As people worry about how they are going to pay rent in the midst of a pandemic, DAs want more money to invest in technology to arrest and persecute people of color. As students try to work on their school work in home environments, the NYC budget cuts education TWENTY SEVEN times more than it cuts funding for the NYPD. Statistics like this make it extremely clear where the city’s priorities lie. To keep New Yorkers safe, Black and brown people need cops OUT of their communities, and instead need actual investment into their livelihood. Our lives depend on it.



352 West 110<sup>th</sup> Street | New York, NY 10025 | 212-678-4667  
DegreesNYC@goddard.org

May 27, 2020

Thank you Chair Treyger and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify on remote learning. **#DegreesNYC** is a collective impact initiative founded by Goddard Riverside Options Center, Graduate NYC, and Young Invincibles, with a goal of achieving equity in postsecondary access and completion in New York City. The partners' vision is that, by 2025, at least 60 percent of each racial, ethnic, and income group in New York City will have a quality postsecondary credential. This includes enrolling in and graduating from a two- or four-year college, a vocational program, or a public service program, such as City Year. Our Youth Council anchors our work and policy and advocacy agenda with student voice and experience.

Our work is grounded in the values of collective impact, youth leadership, equity and strategic learning as a community. During the time of COVID-19, #DegreesNYC and the #DegreesNYC Youth Council have been working diligently to ensure that students and families have access to much needed resources and services.

We are surveying stakeholders within our network and collecting data on students' and families' needs, mental health, motivation and young people's academic progress. The following are two testimonies from students—one in High School, the other in college—of what the remote learning experience has been for them.

### **Remote Learning Testimonies from two students:**

#### **Rosalía Minyety's Testimony (HS Senior):**

"I used to think remote learning was going to be easy. I thought it'd be better because I'd be at home and time would be easier to manage. It's not. Remote learning has made me lose motivation, curiosity and hope. This is not only because of the amount of work that we are given (because it is much more than when we were physically at school) but also because our situations at home don't let us concentrate or even attempt to do our best.

Maybe some of us have not been directly affected by COVID-19, but being in quarantine, restricted from living what we used to think was 'normal,' affects us.

It feels as if school administrators don't remember that we are human beings, or that we also have other things to worry about besides school.

It is honestly hard to manage; I have to make sure I have everything ready for school: that I still participate in my humanities class, complete my calculus worksheets along with 30+ textbook questions, and finish my science projects on time. And then do the same exact thing for my 10-year old sister, while I take care of my baby sister (because my mom works outside).

School has been adding to the personal AND internal stress we all have. But regardless of all of this, I have to act like I can physically, mentally and emotionally keep going because I still have personal goals I want to achieve as a current high school senior. The same goal we have been imposed in our young brains as the only way to be successful in life: have good grades even during these times—grades that, instead of measuring how much we learned in a class, show how easy it was for us to process all the changes around us.”

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Year Student, CUNY City College:**

“The beginning of remote learning came as a surprise to most of us. A lot of us did not even know that the last day of in-person instruction WOULD be the last. It was a big sudden change for both professors and students. Right after having a third of the semester in person, we had an unexpected one week break in which we were not explained what we should've expected for the structure or flow of remote instructions. Professors had deadlines to meet and content to get through, and in the rush to meet them, students such as myself fell behind.

In the case of my statistics class, on the last day of in-person instruction, we were starting a new chapter. On the first day of remote learning, the professor did a 15 minute breakdown of the new format of class and dove right into content. I barely had had time to wrap my head around everything that was going on, and turns out that sitting in front of my laptop for TWO HOURS AND FIVE MINUTES for that one class was more exhausting remotely than I had estimated. Her lectures, I feel, were WAY heavier than they should have been, considering learning was remote. There were barely, if any, activities to keep the minds of the students entertained, and considering the class was so dense and lengthy, they were necessary. Teachers were told to prepare a new syllabus, but they DID NOT have to change any of their existing lectures to adjust to remote learning.

With the death of my grandmother, even more issues rose. I missed two classes in which my falling behind became irreversible. I received tutoring as much as I could, but a tutor is supposed to reinforce what one knows, not teach him from scratch. Though I understand CUNY took a lot of measures thinking of the wellbeing of students, I believe they fell short to provide solutions to deal with this pandemic. [In retrospect, as a CUNY student, I would suggest the following:]

**Bullet form:**

- Classes with mandatory cumulative department finals should have been exempt, so that professors would have been allowed to teach as much content as they could, but not be pressed to teach the content to its entirety.
- Professors should have been asked to re-construct their lesson plans to have more student engagement, and for appropriate classes, less density per session.
- Instead, content should have been taught not only by remote sessions, but also by having the students watch videos or write papers or do activities that required their own research, and those research would have them counted as quizzes or homework.

**Recommendations from #DegreesNYC and the #DegreesNYC Youth Council:**

Our initial survey of students' remote learning experiences indicated the following were needed:

- Tutoring
- Quiet work space
- Wifi/Internet service
- Printer and scanner
- Laptop/ Computers

Others mentioned:

- Headphones
- Stipends or Grants
- Research resources
- Equipment
- Software
- More office hours/advisement
- Meaningful and relevant work and assignments (not just busy work)

Thank you.



## Public Arts Education is Essential

Education cannot be equitable if every child does not have access to the arts. As we imagine the future of education, unpeeling the levels of injustice that have created inequitable opportunities for the youth of our city, we must remember the essentialness of the arts.

As artists, arts education funders, parents, teachers, community leaders, and fellow New Yorkers, we stand with the Arts Education Committee to the Panel for Education Policy and the Arts Education Roundtable in calling on Chancellor Carranza to deem the arts as essential and on Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to invest in arts education by ensuring that funding cuts for arts education are proportional to other disciplines and that the infrastructure for arts education is not lost. Let us not reimagine a society that doubles down on injustice and inequity.

These weeks have shown New Yorkers that the arts are an important part of resilience, recovery, and meaning-making. As a city, we have been dancing, singing, painting, baking, writing and playacting as we make our way through the pandemic. The arts have been a silver lining to long worrisome days and a way for families to express fears and sorrow, endure pain and loss, find calm, and imagine a new future.

Parents are intimately understanding the importance of creative outlets and arts learning as they enter their homes in new ways. Teachers and parents report that their children are often most engaged when remotely learning art. Students are imagining and analyzing space in a new way by choreographing site-specific dances in their stairways, kitchens, and closets after viewing works of master choreographers. They are drawing rainbows for hope. They are taking music classes with and without their instruments. They are singing together to celebrate special occasions online. They are creating and performing original plays with theater professionals. And much more.

This is a moment of diminished government resources when cuts to public education may be necessary. But we are alarmed by proposed cuts that disproportionately impact arts education and step back from equitable educational goals. As we move forward, let us learn from history - when the City deemed arts education “non-essential” in order to save English, mathematics, history, and science education. Teachers lost jobs. Studios, equipment and resources dried up. City youth lost the opportunity to discover talents, gain necessary skills the arts teach, and pursue careers and interests they had no idea existed.

The lives of our students, especially those in communities of color, in public housing and homeless shelters, with disabilities, and in under-resourced communities, are being contracted. The places of retreat they had – their schools, playgrounds, streets, friends, arts classes – have been taken overnight. If on-line arts education classes can provide a lifeline for these youth, we must not take away the arts education infrastructure currently supporting this work.

Now, more than ever, the strength of communities, and the resources of place – culture, social cohesion, place-based organizations -- determine our ability to recognize, respond to, and recover from crisis. Our arts and cultural organizations are key resources in our neighborhoods and communities. Arts and culture are assets in our communities. Arts and cultural organizations are community lifelines – proven each day throughout this pandemic. They don't

only deliver arts – they are the connection for students to each other, role models, community centers, food, health, technology and housing. These organizations are community anchors.

To meet the needs of New York’s young people, the Chancellor must deem the arts essential. The City must guarantee that the Office of Arts & Special Projects and the arts education infrastructure, especially arts teachers, are not lost; honor all FY2020 contracts for organizations that have delivered services; maintain contract and supply funding levels for arts programming in middle and high schools; continue the new and flourishing CREATE program, the key arts component of the Pre-K Foundations for the Common Core; and ensure that the [School Allocation Memorandum](#) is not cut disproportionately for arts education. This spells out key services, including professional development for teachers and expanded opportunities for high-need students.

What New Yorkers need now is hope for the future that will be built by our young people. We owe it to them and the city we love to give **every** child in **every** school the tools they need to heal, dream, and create.

Signatories (alphabetical order)

Sarah Arison, *President, Arison Arts Foundation*  
Jody Gottfried Arnhold, *Founder, Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) 92Y*  
Sarah Calderon, *Co-Chair, Arts Committee for Panel on Educational Policy*  
H.T. Chen, *Artistic Director, Chen Dance Center*  
Ben Rodriguez-Cubenas, *Chair, CreateNYC*  
Judy Dimon, *Co-Founder and Chair, HERE to HERE*  
Dr. Sharon Dunn, *Former Head of Arts Education, NYC Department of Education*  
Oskar Eustis, *Artistic Director, The Public Theater*  
Thelma Golden, *Director & Chief Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem*  
Agnes Gund, *Founder, Studio in a School*  
Russell Granet, *President & CEO, New 42*  
Lane Harwell, *Co-Chair, Arts Committee for Panel on Educational Policy*  
Kemi Ilesanmi, *Executive Director, The Laundromat Project*  
Virginia Johnson, *Artistic Director, Dance Theatre of Harlem*  
Wynton Marsalis, *Managing and Artistic Director, Jazz at Lincoln Center*  
Rebecca Miller, *Writer/Director and Board Chair, Arthur Miller Foundation*  
Seth Pinsky, *CEO, 92nd St. Y*  
Fiona Rudin, *Chair, New 42*  
Laurie Tisch, *President, Laurie M Tisch Illumination Fund*  
Eduardo Vilaro, *Artistic Director and CEO, Ballet Hispanico*  
Darren Walker, *President, Ford Foundation*  
Heather Watts  
Damian Woetzel, *President, The Juilliard School*

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to request that you do not cut funding for the performing arts in NYC Schools. Of utmost importance is that arts funding should not be cut in any NYC Middle and High Schools where students major in performing arts such as Professional Performing Arts HS & MS, Fiorella H. La Guardia HS, and Frank Sinatra to name a few. The arts are as essential to these students as math, science and humanities. It is a huge part of their school day and essential to who they are as developing people. Many choose performing arts as their careers of choice and early exposure not only gives them a leg up on their chosen fields but ignites their love of learning across all subjects.

Also by fueling a student's imagination and creativity, the arts enhance a student's problem-solving and critical thinking skills, which aid their learning in other subject areas. An education in the arts exposes students to a variety of cultures while enriching their learning experience and teaching them how to be empathetic, tolerant and open to working with others, all necessary skills for success in a multicultural society.

Sincerely,

Laura Caufield

Parent with a Drama Major at Professional Performing Arts HS.



**TESTIMONY BEFORE  
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET  
MAY 25, 2020**

The Harlem Educational Activities Fund, HEAF, would like to thank the members of the New York City Council for your past support. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Committee on Education on the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget.

**INTRODUCTION and NEED:**

The Harlem Educational Activities Fund (HEAF) changes the lives of underserved young people, beginning in public middle school and continuing in college and beyond, through an outstandingly successful youth development approach that includes rigorous year-round academic enrichment, social and cultural exposure and constant individual attention.

HEAF creates pathways to college and the workforce for over 600 underserved NYC minority youth each year, by providing resources that help them achieve higher education, fulfilling careers, and greater lifetime earnings. HEAF provides high-quality college access and success programming to the “forgotten middle”—middle-achieving students from low-income families, who qualify neither for remedial nor extremely competitive programs in their schools. More than 90% of the youth we serve are African-American or Hispanic and are primarily from low-to moderate-income, first generation college families in New York underserved communities.

HEAF has been highly successful in impacting the lives of thousands of New York City youth since its founding in 1989 through its academic, enrichment and social skills programs. HEAF provides a continuum of educational and youth development and leadership opportunities to high potential underserved students beginning in middle school, extending through high school and continuing through to college graduation, and beyond. More than a just a college access program, HEAF provides not only academic mentoring but also life skills coaching and experiential experiences that stimulate a love of learning and build the kind of self-confidence necessary to succeed in college and beyond. Our long term commitment to our students’ success is part of what makes HEAF’s program so successful. And, while many college-preparatory programs focus strictly on academic enrichment, HEAF’s programming is built around the “whole person;” we are not only seeking to move students toward college and the workforce, but rather to address all their needs in an integrated way. We do this by offering generous one-on-one time for each student and complementing our academic curriculum with a rich menu of

youth development services, including leadership retreats, character building exercises, and student-led community service work.

### ***Our Program Model:***

The HEAF Continuum, our eleven-year suite of college access and success services, consists of:

- **High Expectations**, which prepares middle school youth for admission to college-preparatory high schools through academic support, preparation for the Specialized High School Admissions Test, and electives (e.g. STEAM, arts enrichment).
- **Summer Quest**, our five-week summer enrichment program, which combats summer learning loss and prepares students for the next school year.
- **College Quest**, which offers college access services to high school students, including SAT prep, college tours, and college and financial aid counseling.
- **Onward**, HEAF's college success program that provides students with resources to transition successfully to college; earn four-year degrees on time; and continue onto professional careers.
- Our **Youth Development** and Leadership Academy, which offers opportunities for leadership development, character building, and service learning.

### ***Accomplishments and Evidence of Success:***

HEAF has a 31-year track record of delivering strong, permanent outcomes that exceed New York City and national averages. Below are a few of our students' achievements:

- 100% graduate high school on time—the 2019 NYC average is 67% for African-American students and 64% for Hispanic students in Harlem.
- Nearly 100% enroll in four-year colleges immediately after graduating high school—in NYC 57% of students enroll in college or career programs within 6 months of graduation.
- 83% of our college students earn a bachelor's degree within six years—nationally, the average is 37% for African-American students and 42% for Hispanic students who are enrolled in four-year colleges.

HEAF is very proud of the achievements of each of our students. Below, we have highlighted two stories to highlight the process and accomplishments our model produces:

*Clara joined HEAF in 1996, shortly after emigrating to the U.S. from Bogota, Colombia. She felt lost as she faced the challenges of learning a new language, living in public housing, and financial hardship. Clara found that HEAF provided her with a positive outlet and introduced her to possibilities and experiences she never thought possible, both culturally and academically. Through the leadership workshops, youth retreats, and college trips, Clara learned that she can provide value and found her talents as a leader. In 2005, Clara graduated Cum Laude from Baruch College. Today she is a CPA and a Financial Controller. She continues to give back to HEAF by making donations, supporting her younger peers, and serving on our Alumni Advisory Board.*

*Crissaris walked through HEAF's doors as a 12-year old Dominican girl nearly 20 years ago. As a kid from a neighborhood riddled with crime and poverty, a single-mother immigrant*

*household, and a public school with sky-high dropout rates, she defied the odds. Crissaris is a first-generation college student who grew up in a loving and caring, but economically disadvantaged immigrant household in Upper Manhattan. Her mother, who worked diligently to support her children, does not speak English and wasn't always able to help Crissaris with her homework and complex application forms for high school, college, and financial aid. Fortunately, HEAF was there to provide the support and practical resources to get through it. With HEAF's help, Crissaris applied to 14 colleges and was accepted into 13, including Yale College, where she matriculated and earned her BS before enrolling in medical school at Columbia University. Today, she works as an Assistant Clinical Professor at Mount Sinai Hospital's Urgent Care Centers—the only physician on staff hired directly after residency! HEAF was instrumental in helping Crissaris navigate her journey to becoming an Ivy League graduate, an accomplished physician, and the youngest faculty member at one of NYC's most prestigious hospitals.*

The young people HEAF serves face many obstacles to educational achievement, including failing schools, lack of role models, and several other financial, cultural, and socio-economic barriers. Nationwide, minority college enrollment has increased over the past decade; however, African-American and Hispanic students are still far behind their white peers with regard to college graduation and post-graduate achievement. Only 37% of African-American students and 42% of Hispanic students who enroll in college complete their undergraduate degrees within six years, and they often continue to struggle in the professional world, facing obstacles to finding employment and seeing nearly 20% lower lifetime earnings than their white counterparts. In light of these statistics, the need for HEAF's services is urgent. HEAF works to ensure that ambitious, but economically disadvantaged minority students in our community have the same chances as their more privileged peers to succeed in school, graduate four-year colleges, and transition onto professional careers.

### ***Our Expansion:***

HEAF opened its first replication in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn in 2014, after 25 years of successfully running our program in Harlem. Since that time, our Brooklyn program has grown considerably in both impact and capacity. We started the program with middle school grades 6-8. In 2016, we began adding high school grades with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade class and have added a successive grade each year; this year we have added a 12<sup>th</sup> grade class and we look forward to graduating our first class of high school seniors in Brooklyn. Additionally, in the summer of 2019, we ran our Summer Quest program in Brooklyn for the first time. The program ran for four weeks, from July 8<sup>th</sup> to August 2<sup>nd</sup> – it was a huge success! This fall, we are implementing further growth in Brooklyn – we are expanding our program and moving to a new location which will help accommodate our programming needs.

In working to further extend our impact in New York City, HEAF has been looking at establishing our program model at a site in Queens and had been exploring which communities would benefit from our program. We are thrilled to announce that we opened our third site in

Queens this fall. HEAF launched in East Elmhurst to host our first-ever program in Queens. The program is serving 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders and will expand to serve more students across grades 6-8 by the end of this academic year. The program will later expand to host students from different schools across the borough.

With your support, we can expand HEAF's influence and reach by scaling current operations, adding new locations and providing a continuum of impactful programs at our sites that will attract and retain a large number of participants. Strategies for expansion also include creating and leveraging strong partnerships with higher education and K-12 school systems and community organizations.

## **OUR REQUEST**

HEAF respectfully requests support in order to help our program across New York City to expand its educational outreach.

More than 90% of the youth we serve are African American or Hispanic and are primarily from low- to moderate-income, first generation college families in underserved communities; approximately 35% are from immigrant households. HEAF is the only multi-year college access/success program that serves the often-neglected "forgotten middle" – middle-achieving students from low-income families who qualify neither for remedial nor top programs in their schools.

HEAF stands out among other college preparatory programs by:

- \* Serving youth who otherwise would not have the same opportunities and resources as their more privileged peers.
- \* Our long-term commitment to student success – beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade all the way through college and beyond.
- \* Our holistic approach – rather than focusing strictly on academic enrichment, HEAF is built around developing the "whole person" by complementing our academic curriculum with a rich menu of youth development services, including leadership retreats, character building exercises, and student-led community service work.

HEAF's program includes:

- \* Rigorous instruction in English, math and electives.
- \* One-on-one advisement to discuss best fit schools and provide application support.
- \* College readiness support, including college exposure, campus tours, and workshops to help build skills to thrive in school.
- \* Academic support, tutoring, test prep, and one-on-one counseling.

Your support will help HEAF put more middle school students on the path to college.

## **CONCLUSION**

HEAF's program works to prepare students for middle school, high school and college, but also for their future entry into the professional workforce. With such a high track record and

successful program model, the more students we can serve, the more who can successfully go on to college, graduate, and be successful in life. HEAF not only provides excellent academic enrichment, which allows our students to get ahead of what they are being taught in school, tutoring support where needed if a student is falling behind, but also a strong curriculum of social-emotional growth and support. HEAF is constantly looking to improve our curriculum, e.g. STEAM and STEM classes to get students ready for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs and careers. We want to broaden our students' horizons through exposure to various industries and career fields, the arts – theater, ballet, music, etc. – so they are not limited by what they do not know or understand.

By starting in middle school, HEAF helps to ensure the greatest long-term student impact. The better our students perform in middle school will lead to better access to selective high schools. The better access to selective high schools will lead to better college placement, and thus will lead to better job opportunities. Better job opportunities will ensure economic stability.

We look forward to continuing our partnership as we seek to further increase our impact in the lives of underserved minority New York City youth by expanding our Continuum programs, services, and capacity in Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and beyond. We deeply appreciate your consideration of our request, and your dedication to New York City.





**Testimony of Lena Bilik, Policy Analyst, Children's Aid**  
**Submitted Testimony on City Council Oversight Hearing on Remote Learning**  
**Committee on Education**  
**May 27, 2020**

My name is Lena Bilik, Policy Analyst at Children's Aid. I would like to thank Chair Mark Treyger and the members of the Education Committee for convening this hearing and giving us the opportunity to submit testimony on the impact of Remote Learning on the communities we serve.

For nearly 167 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. We are leading a comprehensive counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life. We have also constructed a continuum of services, positioned every step of the way throughout childhood that builds well-being and prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today our over 2,000 full and part time staff members empower nearly 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 in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island. For over 25 years, Children's Aid has also 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 relevant than ever right now. Currently, Children's Aid partners with 21 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.

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 School 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.

Today, I want to lift up the work that Children's Aid and other community-based organizations (CBOs) have been doing to support the shift to remote learning during this crisis. The shift to remote learning has undoubtedly been challenging, but CBO staff have been an invaluable presence during this transition, especially with the crucial remote academic support we have been offering our students to make sure that students stay engaged. This pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on low-income and minority communities, and CBOs provide services that ensure that our most vulnerable students are not left behind. CBOs have shifted a majority of our services to being offered remotely, and stand ready to work with the city to expand those services throughout the summer, and adapt to the ever-changing public health



regulations to be able to ensure youth are learning and engaged through the public health crisis.

During this crisis, we have transitioned our academic supports to remote methods that have helped students with the challenges of remote learning under these extreme circumstances; these include all types of active learning and engagement, including tutoring, afterschool clubs, Family Life and Sex Education, and homework help. Between March 30 and May 8, we made 7,577 remote contacts with youth participants. We also have been keeping up with our attendance work online, with over 1,000 attendance outreaches made in that same time period. Our staff has been conducting 1:1 calls, emails, and zooms to check in with families on how remote learning/access is going, whether food is available, and general inquiries about needs and/or provision of community resources. Our staff has also been providing remote mental health, counseling, teletherapy, and social emotional support sessions. Our mental health support has been crucial; many of our students are facing real loss, trauma, fear, anxiety about the future, and depression. We have played a significant role in helping students through the college process remotely, when so many students are feeling despondent and overwhelmed by the future. We have also been helping a great deal with tech support and making sure devices reach the families who need them. We have continued robust parent engagement work, with a few virtual groups rapidly becoming parent support groups to help families through this difficult time. Between March 30 and May 8, our community school staff made 32,925 contacts with clients through calls, emails, and zooms.

CBOs have provided invaluable support to teachers doing the difficult work of teaching remote school during a pandemic. At our community school MS 301, our Success Mentors, who already have relationships with students, are paired with teachers and when students do not participate, the Success Mentors contact the families and speak with the students to find out what is going on. If the students do not understand the content or struggle with the technology, our Success Mentors support them through the barriers to get them back on track. Similarly, our Community School 211 runs what is called "Late Bloomers Classroom". In Leadership attendance meetings, the team identifies the students that have not been logging into google classroom after 12:00pm. They determine the support needed for the students, and take a 1:1 approach, in which targeted services are offered to the students not signing in, logging in late, or having challenges with google classroom. Success Mentors work closely with teachers regarding assignments, ensuring that assignments are completed and submitted before the student leaves the google classrooms that we have set up specifically for their individual work with students. Our staff in community school PS 152 continue to follow up with their mentees and provide support with activities in Google Classroom and homework. As a result of this engagement, several children who had been struggling saw improvement in attendance and engagement in recent weeks, one of them even achieving 100% attendance, two demonstrating increased attendance and academic gains. Another who had become disengaged returned to missing no more than one day per week after numerous conversations between our staff and the student's parent. Because of the close relationships CBO staff have with students and communities, they are able to provide targeted support to keep students on



track with their learning in a non-punitive, personalized way. Teachers have been so inspiring in making the difficult switch to remote learning, but they are inevitably very overwhelmed, and the presence of CBO partners and CBO-provided youth services have already eased much of the burden during this crisis.

As you know, Mayor de Blasio's FY2021 Executive Budget made devastating cuts to the summer youth services mostly provided by CBOs. Children's Aid stands with other CBO youth service providers and advocates concerned with the well-being of New York City's young people this summer. The FY2021 Executive Budget eliminated over \$213 million in summer funding for Beacons, COMPASS summer camp, SONYC summer camp, NYCHA Cornerstones, and the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). These cuts will leave nearly 175,000 New Yorkers below the age of 24 with little to no supports and activities this summer, on top of the financial struggles and trauma they and their families are facing. We are deeply concerned by the prospect of NYC youth going through the entire summer without the programming CBOs provide, especially with schools closed through the rest of the school year and social distancing guidelines unclear for the foreseeable future. Through the very real challenges with remote learning, CBOs have been learning best practices that can inform virtual programming throughout the summer to keep students engaged and learning. CBOs have responded to COVID-19 by providing online tutoring, recreational activities, behavioral health care and additional family resources. They must be able to continue this work this summer so that no student is left behind.

The CBO network of providers who run youth programs have played a vital role for children and their families during COVID-19 and must be an essential part of the City's recovery efforts over the summer and into the fall. If the City does not support summer programming, the result will be the dismantling of a critical component of the city's human services infrastructure for youth and families. Without City funding for summer, CBOs are being forced to make very difficult decisions, and many of us will need to eliminate staff who would otherwise serve as the bridge from the school year to summer and to fall. Without funding, we are missing the opportunity for continuity in support and communication with families over the summer, and the opportunity to help young people recover from the crisis and prepare for the school year ahead. The benefits of summer programming are more important than ever after months of learning loss due to trauma and mental health challenges as well as academic disruptions from distance learning. To eliminate the summer camps, Beacon, SYEP, and Cornerstone Programs without an alternative recovery plan in place is to abandon the individual children, young people, and families who rely on CBO-provided programming in an unprecedented time of need.

CBOs and the city must work together to keep our youth safe, healthy, supported, and learning this summer. We have an opportunity – and responsibility – to design a recovery that includes public, nonprofit, and private sector leaders to reimagine how we ensure the health and learning of all kids this summer and beyond. Because of the deep roots we have in our neighborhoods **and the best practices we have gained through the remote programming that we have already been providing**, CBOs can skillfully adapt our programs and services to meet



each community's changing needs and interests. We have already shifted many of the supports we provide to children and families to remote methods, and so can play a key role in addressing this challenge as essential partners in the city's economic recovery effort. We stand ready to help the city bring all sectors together to leverage collective expertise and resources to devise a path forward to address health and safety in the short term while also prioritizing a summer of recovery and engagement for the city's youth. Investing in our city's youth is investing in our city's future, and they need our support now more than ever.

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

Lily Lipman

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

5/28/20

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Lily Lipman and I work at New York City Children's Theater (NYCCT) throughout the NYC boroughs.

The mission of NYCCT is to promote children's literacy and social development through professional theater productions and arts-in-education programs. We reach children and their communities with a wide range of programming, including full-scale productions, small touring shows, interactive workshops and in-school residencies, and engage with them in traditional theater spaces, school auditoriums, classrooms and cultural venues in their neighborhoods.

We demonstrate that engaging young people in the arts has a positive impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development, and furthers a lifelong appreciation of the arts.

My favorite role at NYCCT is as a teaching artist in the After School Reading Program in different homeless shelters throughout NYC. These classes allow us to interact with a different community of children that aren't usually offered this kind of programming. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. If budget cuts did happen I would be out of a job and my dad just passed away because of COVID. I need to support my family and I don't know how I can do that without these jobs related to the education world. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Lily Lipman



**The New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
Remote Hearing Testimony  
May 27, 2020**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition  
Submitted by Liza Schwartzwald, Manager of Education Policy**

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify. 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. The NYIC wishes to express our deep appreciation to the City Council and the Mayor for the \$12 million investment in adult literacy funding and services over these past four years, and we are grateful for City Council's leadership during this devastating pandemic. We welcome this opportunity to testify about the impacts of COVID-19 and remote learning on our immigrant families and to share our recommendations on how the Department of Education (DOE) should approach the coming school year.

The NYIC's Education Collaborative convenes over 30 community leaders, advocates, and practitioners from across NYC's immigrant communities at the grassroots level. With over 30 years of experience reforming the state's educational system, we have a distinguished track record of improving Multilingual Learners' and immigrant students' access to resources and working with the DOE to address barriers immigrants face. Our member organizations specifically serve the needs of marginalized immigrant communities - including newly-arrived immigrants, low-income families, and youth and adults with limited English proficiency (LEP). Our Education Collaborative leaders are fierce champions for our kids and their families and are always striving to ensure our students get a shot at realizing their true potential.

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored and compounded the profound inequities already affecting immigrant families and ELLs in our school system. In order to avoid transitioning the inequalities of

**New York Immigration Coalition**

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the past into remote learning platforms of the present, we must transform the system with a particular focus on equity, transparency, and justice. The Education Collaborative members have identified major challenges in the DOE's current approach and have outlined steps to institute more equitable approaches that ensure immigrant families, ELLs, and all students receive the services they need and deserve.

**Immigrants are not receiving critical information.** The NYC school system has long struggled to integrate immigrant families and help them engage in their children's education, largely due to breakdowns of communication and lack of access to timely translations and interpretations. The COVID-19 crisis has compounded these inequitable dynamics. Additionally, immigrant families that did not already have the technology and digital literacy to access online platforms have struggled to get in contact with their schools' teachers, counselors/mental health professionals, and administrators.

- Our members have shared that crucial information related to the DOE's response to COVID-19 is only available online and/or only in English. Many of the families who are facing the most severe disconnect from their schools are also those who are most likely to have limited reading and digital literacy skills and/or lack access to use devices and stable WiFi for their children to participate in remote learning.
- Many immigrant families still do not know how to get technology, including WiFi, how to set it up, and how to get troubleshooting support in their language.
- Families report innumerable technological issues, (eg. malfunctioning DOE laptops, inconsistent or unavailable WiFi, low bandwidth, multiple children sharing devices, etc.).
- The device request form was only available online and the device hotline was only in English for months, which led to gaps for families who could not already access the internet and/or did not speak English.
- Despite the remarkable efforts of the DOE to deliver over 290,000 devices, many immigrant families had to wait up to 2 months for tablets or laptops, and some have yet to get devices, resulting in a significant loss of instructional time.

**LEP immigrant parents, ELL students, and students with disabilities struggle to receive the same level of attention and educational opportunities as their peers.** This issue has been exacerbated by the transition to remote learning.





- Families lack adequate support and training to support their children throughout the transition to remote learning.
- Immigrant students are having difficulty accessing the mental health supports they need at home at a time when mental health needs are growing.
- Many children struggle with unsafe or overwhelming living conditions.
- Many immigrant families and children are disproportionately facing trauma, sickness, food insecurity, and/or financial hardships.
- The Remote Learning Survey is only available online, does not solicit open-ended responses, and does not ask about issues that may be affecting LEP immigrant families.

As a result of these issues, immigrant families are deeply worried that their children will not be promoted, will drop out, or will fail to graduate, especially those whose children had already been struggling in school.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1) The City Council should demand that the Department of Education collect system-wide data on the impact of the pandemic for all student subgroups and address the inadequate number of quality programs that can successfully serve older immigrant newcomers (16 - 21 year olds) in NYC's outer boroughs.**

In order to effectively target supports to youth who have fallen behind during the pandemic, the DOE must first build a system-level database to track which students are falling behind. The DOE must collect and make publicly available school system-level data on student subgroups that are not engaged in remote learning. The DOE and City Council should use this data to identify areas of need, deploy and target supports to vulnerable students, and identify best practices moving forward.

- 2) The City Council should demand the DOE do a sample survey of at least 500 NYC Limited English Proficient (LEP) families and/or English Language Learners (ELLs) by the end of the school year.**



Targeting a small but significant number of LEP families or ELL students through direct one-on-one calls would help the DOE and community based organizations, and partners understand the academic and basic needs of immigrants and ELLs that have yet to be addressed since the DOE's transition to remote learning.

**3) The City Council should support a 3-year, transfer school pilot to increase newly arrived, high-school-aged immigrants' access to programs that meet their needs.**

While the City works to extend remote learning across the boroughs, we must remember that thousands of immigrant youth were not even in school in the first place because they lacked access to programs that met their needs even during “normal times.” Our member organizations have consistently found that particularly older newcomers and SIFE students are not being given adequate choices. Currently, many transfer schools do not have adequate supports for Multilingual Learners and avoid enrolling older MLLs, despite the fact that traditional night school programs in Queens and Brooklyn that historically served these students were closed as part of Mayor Bloomberg's controversial school reforms. Unfortunately, there are few DOE schools able to provide the support older immigrant ELLs need to be successful.

The DOE's “ELL transfer schools” provide a supportive learning environment for older immigrant students, including intensive English as a New Language (ENL) instruction, bilingual social workers, and partnerships with community-based organizations to help address immigration, housing, and other needs. However, there are only five such schools, four of which are located in Manhattan, making it difficult for students in other boroughs to attend. While the City is home to over two dozen non-ELL transfer schools, which are located across the five boroughs and serve over-age and under-credited youth, these schools do not offer the intensive ENL classes and robust social-emotional supports that recently arrived immigrant students typically need.

Data show that the need is real. Our proposal is supported by an analysis done by the Migration Policy Institute using Census data, which found that NYC is home to approximately 4,200 high school-aged newcomer immigrant youth who are 14-21 who are not enrolled in school and who do not already have a high school diploma. Of those, over 90% are 16 to 21, which is the toughest age range to find adequate placements.



This pilot would address a longstanding issue across NYC's immigrant communities. Older immigrant youth consistently struggle to find adequate school placements, especially if they arrived after the age of 16. While budgetary difficulties will be exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, we cannot give up on these thousands of young people who deserve an opportunity to a meaningful education and would bring in additional per-pupil funding.

New York City's immigrant youth are dropping out in staggering numbers. MLLs/ELLs have the highest dropout rate (26%) of any subgroup in New York City, two-to-three times that of other subgroups. This is particularly devastating given the fact that MLLs/ELLs outperform native-English-speaking peers when given the right supports. Moreover, only 35% of MLLs/ELLs graduate in time, which greatly affects the overall city graduation rate (77%). Older MLLs and Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) face even greater barriers to graduating. In addition to being academically behind their peers, SIFE students often have a complex and sometimes intensive need for psychological and social support. Improving the options for MLL/ELL youth is a critical component of addressing the dropout rate and boosting graduation rates.

New York City must address the inconsistent engagement with MLL/ELL students in remote learning, the devastating MLL dropout rate, and the fact that thousands of our newcomer immigrant youth don't have access to the public school system. While the City is confronting a public health crisis, we cannot miss the opportunity to address a long-overlooked, silent crisis rooted in systemic inequity. We urge our City Council to not only be aware of this pressing problem but also to help us fund this much-needed pilot program.

**4) The City Council should restore and baseline the \$12 million for DYCD-funded adult literacy services.**

Adult literacy classes provide the basis for our immigrant community to navigate every aspect of life in a new country. This is especially important for immigrant parents of young children who are limited English proficient. Parents are their child's most important resource in accessing education services, healthcare, and other necessary services. Adult literacy classes provide parents with the



opportunity to acquire these necessary skills and also support their children throughout their own education. This gap in English and digital literacy has become even more dire as the entire educational system has moved to remote learning for its K-12 students. Those parents, and especially parents of young children, who have not had access to these essential programs have struggled to keep their children engaged and involved in their schooling. A lack of digital literacy knowledge and access, in particular, has meant some students of immigrant children have lost weeks to months of valuable educational time and support because their parents did not themselves have the access and knowledge to connect. These gaps will only grow larger if the city does not fully restore its adult literacy funding. In a city committed to immigrant rights, justice, and opportunity, for our increasingly diverse community, failing to adequately support city-funded English language and literacy classes would be an abandonment of the thousands of adults who benefit from them and of their children who rely on them for support.

The Mayor and City Council have shown a principled commitment to the immigrant families in our city, but we must do more. Immigrant families and their children are falling behind as our city races to respond to the dire health concerns affecting everyone. We must ensure that our families are not left even further disadvantaged by a lack of supports that could widen the gap of educational attainment.

Thank you,

**Liza Schwartzwald**

*Manager of Education Policy*

New York Immigration Coalition

Lschwartzwald@NYIC.org

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF LOCAL 372, NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES  
DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 | AFSCME  
TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
REGARDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE CITY'S SCHOOLS  
MAY 27, 2020

Chairman Treyger and distinguished members of the City Council Committee on Education, I am [name], [title] of Local 372 - NYC Board of Education Employees, District Council 37 - AFSCME. Under the leadership of our President, Shaun D. Francois I, Local 372 represents approximately 24,000 public school employees who perform essential support services to help the 1.2 million public school children of New York City be learning-ready. I am here today to provide testimony on the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City's schools.

This school year began with its traditional challenges, however everything changed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local 372 commends the City for prioritizing the health and safety of the students and tens of thousands of teachers and support staff with its decision to close our 1,800 schools. And as you know, a number of our members, including many of the school district's 9,000 School Lunch Workers and 2,600 School Crossing Guards remain on the job throughout the city. Local 372 applauds these workers, who are placed in harm's way – at risk of exposure to the ongoing pandemic – because their responsibilities play an essential role in keeping the wheels of society turning.

Local 372 School Lunch Employees work hard each day to serve breakfasts and lunch as, during these times of pandemic, many schoolchildren and members of the community continue to rely on schools for access to meals. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these workers have served over 10 million meals to students, their families, and members of the community. We must remember many families are not just suffering food insecurities, but possible domestic abuse, deaths in the family, and unemployment. Parent Coordinators make sure no child falls through the cracks, and makes sure technological equipment required for remote learning gets to the most vulnerable students. Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (“SAPIS”) monitor the mental health of our students as they deal with stressors from COVID-19. Community Titles make sure to track down students who might be struggling and unresponsive, to assist them with anything they might need. And School Crossing Guards continue to make sure our schools and streets are safe as students and their families.

However, essential workers need more than just applause – they need access to assistance, benefits, and protections that help them continue safely working during this state of emergency. These workers need an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (“PPE”), including masks and gloves, to mitigate the risks of transmission. And the City should provide hazard pay (such as contemplated by Int. 1918) to appropriately compensate these essential workers, who risk their own health and safety to perform vital services for the community in these times of crisis.

And as we turn towards the future, the City must ensure that schools are a safe environment before reopening for the next school year. To that end, the City must:

- implement widespread COVID-19 testing, temperature screenings, and contact tracing for students, teachers, and school staff,
- ramp up both its cleaning and disinfection protocols and the public notification procedures that are already mandated for other communicable diseases,
- maintain social distancing through physical safety measures (such as partitions) and through policy changes (such as CDC mandates for SchoolFood), and
- provide mental health monitoring for both staff and students, including making SAPIS counselors available to students.

In closing, I once again commend the thousands of essential workers represented by Local 372 who continue to provide these services to the public school system as well as to the City as a whole. The City’s children are our lives’ work, and in order for this important work to succeed, the City must ensure today the provision of adequate PPE and provide appropriate pay and benefits commensurate to the risks these workers take on a daily basis. And as we head to a “new normal” tomorrow, the City’s schools must remain a safe place for students, teachers, and support staff to learn and work.

On behalf of the 24,000 members of Local 372, NYC Board of Education, District Council 37 - AFSCME, I thank you for this opportunity to testify. I will answer any questions you may have.

**New York City Council Oversight Hearing  
on Remote Learning**

May 27, 2020

My name is Lori Podvesker and I lead the policy work at INCLUDEnyc. Thank you Chairman Treyger and the entire Committee on Education for holding this important oversight hearing on Remote Learning. INCLUDEnyc (formerly Resources for Children with Special Needs) has worked with hundreds of thousands of families since our founding 37 years ago, helping them navigate the complex special education service and support systems.

We testify today with deep respect and gratitude to our City, the Department of Education, school administrators, teachers, related service providers, counselors, parent coordinators, and all other school staff on their commitment to ensuring our 1.1 million students, including nearly 300,000 students with disabilities, continue to learn during the pandemic and related school closures.

However, during the last ten weeks since remote learning began, hundreds of parents with children who have suspected or known disabilities have called our helpline looking for individual help. And thousands more families have attended our online workshops, live stream discussions with experts, webinars, and have downloaded related resources on our website. Persistent issues and areas of need include:

- Difficulties accessing remote learning:
  - Students and families most pressing needs right now include health, food, housing, and financial insecurities.
  - Many students do not have internet service or a tablet or laptop on which to access school- and class-based learning platforms. Older students do not know how to fix technological problems themselves, and often their parents don't know how to use and troubleshoot them either.
  - At home, students may not have adequate space or the physical environment needed to support productive learning, and they are not benefiting from the social and behavioral support available at school.
  - There has been limited or no live instruction. The absence of specialized instruction makes coursework inaccessible for many of our students. Parents are concerned about regression in knowledge and

-more-

skills and do not understand how their child will make up this missed content.

- Related services are necessary for students with disabilities to meet IEP goals, but many sessions have not been delivered to students.
- There are language barriers for families with school- and class-based communications, coursework, and special education and IEP-related services and documentation which prevent parents from supporting their children.
- Understanding the special education process and legal rights:
  - Parents need to know that evaluations, services, and supports continue to be available even in a remote learning environment.
  - Families are having difficulty understanding the difference between their child's IEP and Special Education Remote Learning Plans. We have heard that many are being developed without parental input.
  - Parents need to be better informed that remote IEP meetings are happening, and that they should be active participants in their child's IEP meeting and process.
  - Parents are also unaware of the need to speak with their child's school about missed instruction and services, and if and how they will be made up (compensatory services).

We fear our students will continue to struggle and risk failing, and the achievement gap between general and special education students will further widen if these issues are not quickly and adequately addressed. As a result, we recommend that the Department of Education:

- Offer special education support and services during the summer to students with 10-month IEPs who are not meeting their IEP goals (known as Extended School Year services).
- Develop plans for compensatory services for students now, before school buildings reopen.
- Offer support and training to parents on how they can help their child access the curriculum based on their child's educational needs.
- Open borough-based centers for on-site evaluations and related services.

Thank you for taking the time today to consider this important matter. We look forward to partnering with you to improve equity and access for all young people with disabilities in New York City.



## The importance of Public School Funding:

I am a mother of two children and an Arts Educator in the NYC Public School System. My daughter is finishing her third year of college at John's Hopkins University. She is studying sustainability and urban ecology. When she graduates, she hopes to move back to New York City and help make our city become an environmentally friendly place to live well into the future. My son is currently attending Bard High School for Early College, where he is receiving an excellent education. He is interested in the sciences and the study of language. Both my children are products of an excellent education that was offered to them by the Department of Education NYC public schools. My children are fourth generation NYers and they both plan to bring their knowledge and expertise back to NYC to make the city a better place for their families and for others.

I work in Arts Education - traveling from school to school teaching dance education. I have seen children, both from academically high performing and low performing schools, blossom socially and emotionally through arts workshops. These programs have been funded through the DOE.

It is imperative that all schools are funded to the highest possible amount. Our schools can be the great equalizer, offering quality education to all of NYC children no matter their zip code. It is a worthwhile investment that will pay off in spades for the future of our children, our city and our world.

Louise Heit



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**Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY**

May 27, 2020

New York City Council Committee on Education  
Remote Learning - The Impact of Coronavirus  
on Students with Disabilities

Lourdes I. Rosa-Carrasquillo, Esq.  
Director of Advocacy

Re:

Thank you for having a hearing on remote learning and affording us the opportunity to testify on the effects of it has had on children with disabilities, and parents.

My name is Lourdes I. Rosa-Carrasquillo, Esq. I am the Director of Advocacy for the Center of Independence the Disabled, NY (CIDNY). CIDNY is a citywide organization that serves people with disabilities including children. CIDNY has a Youth Project in which our counselors go to the schools to teach children with disabilities soft skills as well as their rights.

Since remote learning due to COVID-19 began, we have been hearing from parents who feel that their children are not receiving all the services to which they have a right. Most children we work with have Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is an agreement between the parents and students with disabilities as to what services they have a right to and will receive

Individualized Education Program includes services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. Parents have informed us that their child is not receiving these services. Failure to provide these services causes severe setbacks.

Lack of speech therapy causes delays and setbacks in communicating. Speech therapy helps the child learn and do physical exercise to strengthen the muscles for speech and teach drills to improve clarity or sound to improve articulation.

Lack of physical therapy will delay and even cause major setback on mobility that would develop or restore function, alleviate pain, prevent or decrease permanent physical disabilities, and promote overall health and wellness. Physical therapy is crucial to promote a child's ability to function ability to function independently and participate actively in home, school, and community environments.

Lack of occupational therapy delays children with disabilities from developing the skills to engage in meaningful activities of daily life (such as self-care skills, education, work, or social interaction). Occupational therapy enables and/or encourages participation in such activities whether the disability is physical or mental.

There have also been complaints on how remote learning is virtually impossible for children who require paraprofessionals in the school to help them in various ways. Paraprofessionals are trained to help implement a student's Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). The BIP provides verbal prompts when a student is off

Re:

task, reminding a student who is out of his seat that right now he is supposed to be sitting quietly, placing reminders of class rules throughout the classroom, and teaching the student appropriate problems solving behaviors and ways to manage time.

Parents don't have the skillset to offer any of these services. Services that are developed and rendered by experts.

We have heard about students who are D/deaf and only communicate via American Sign Language. Social workers have informed us that these students are isolated because remote learning is not possible, and that some of the D/deaf children they serve are getting depressed and suicidal.

Ninety percent of D/deaf children are born to hearing parents. Many of those parents either don't sign or lack the command of ASL necessary to do remote education.

We all know how challenging it has been for all children because of lack of interaction with peers and a feeling of seclusion during this time. For students who are D/deaf the inability to go to school and be among peers and teachers who sign causes total isolation.

The issue with the D/deaf, although not perfect, can be addressed by ensuring there are Video Phones (VP) in all the homes. This would afford the students the opportunity to be engage and not feel trapped in her/his head not knowing or understanding what is happening.

A student who is hearing with parents who are D/deaf told us that here is little or no ability for their parent to participate in remote learning. The parent's language is ASL so she lacks the ability to understand English. She cannot assist her son with schoolwork. Therefore, this student is being denied an education through remote learning offered because of the Coronavirus.

CIDNY has heard that the issue with related services (physical, occupational, and speech) is because those services are contracted out. That their staff is not going to homes. That it is being done remotely. Students with certain disabilities cannot connect a therapist via a video. Having parents guided to do therapies is in adequate.

Paraprofessionals work with students in the classroom. They too are not going to the homes.

Re:

There are also classes for children with disabilities that are small. Maintaining social distancing should not be difficult. The New York State Education Department standard for ration of students to staff per classroom is:

- One teacher where there are 15 students.
- One teacher and para in which there are 8-12 students.
- If there are 12 students an additional staff for every three students.
- For autistic children, the ratio is six students with a teacher and a para.

Students with disabilities have a right to all the services in their IEP. The services must be rendered in a manner that achieves the agreement in the IEP.

Based on what parents and social workers are telling us, it is not happening. Students with disabilities are being denied the opportunity for an education that ensures their ability to progress in school the same as students without disabilities.

## TESTIMONY

We need to keep a rigorous schedule for our children during this lockdown. The schools should follow the same time order/periods as they had when the schools were open. This sense of scheduling would make it easier for or children to transition back into their regular school schedules when the Board of Education is ready.

Luke W Constantino



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

**RE: Remote Learning - The Impact of COVID-19 on the City's Schools**

**May 27, 2020**

My name is Maggie Moroff and I coordinate the ARISE Coalition, a group of parents, advocates, educators, academics, and other stakeholders focused on the day-to-day experiences and long term outcomes of students with disabilities in New York City public schools. Our members have been working together for the past 12 years to provide a collective voice in support of NYC's 220,000 students with disabilities. Our member parents and organizations have been on the front lines as remote learning has rolled out and I'm here to share some of what we've seen and what we hope will come next.

To begin, we know that this period of remote learning has been difficult for students and families. We also know that the staff in the central DOE offices – as well as educators at many schools – have been working very hard to make remote learning and services possible. That said, however, ARISE members have seen many challenges in providing instruction and services to students with disabilities during remote learning, which took a while to get up and running for many students. ARISE members continue to hear from families of students with IEPs who have only the most minimal of services now. We continue bringing individual case examples to the DOE's Special Education Office where staff work to address our concerns, but we worry that these cases demonstrate systemic challenges that remain several months into students learning from home.

Let me offer a few examples:

- We have heard from families with children whose special education needs mean they function considerably below their chronological grade who are being given work meant for students at their age level – making it impossible for those students to complete the work and causing frustration for the students and their parents;
- Other families have reported that their children are getting all their work through assignments to do independently with no live instruction or meaningful teacher interaction despite their child's need for instruction and support from a special education teacher;

- We have heard from families whose children are not yet receiving all of their mandated related services remotely and who have not been asked for input into their children's Remote Learning Plans;
- Other families are concerned that remote instruction and services are not effective for their children who typically would be receiving their services through a much more hands-on method;
- Families continue to be told by school staff that evaluations and IEP meetings can't be done until the school buildings reopen -- causing students to go without needed services; and
- Families of students with a range of disabilities – from dyslexia to autism to behavioral challenges – are concerned that their students' specific needs are not being met. For example, students who are D/deaf are feeling isolated because they lack access to teachers and friends who sign. Many parents of D/deaf children either don't sign or lack the command of American Sign Language (ASL) necessary to do remote education.

Students with disabilities are at particular risk of falling behind during this time of remote learning. Their needs are greater than those of their general education peers or they wouldn't require the special education supports in the first place. They are also more likely to rely on in-person adult support—meaning that a student's ability to benefit from the instruction and services offered during remote learning often depends on their parent's availability, language, resources, and technology skills.

The number of students required or recommended for summer school is increasing to 178,000 students, a significant increase from last year due, in part, to the challenges of remote learning. Yet, summer school will continue with remote learning. We eagerly await information from the DOE about how summer school will differ from the remote learning offered since March in order to make what comes next more effective than what we've seen thus far. One recommendation is for the DOE to use IEP teachers and Universal Literacy coaches trained in evidence-based reading instruction to support students who need help with reading this summer since we no longer need to limit students to the staff members who happen to work in their school buildings.

As ARISE works with the DOE to improve remote learning for students with disabilities now, we are also looking ahead. We know how critical it will be for students with disabilities to receive the compensatory services they are legally entitled to receive to make up for the instruction and services they have missed. We look forward to working with the DOE and the City Council to ensure that students with disabilities get the support they need to help them get back on track.

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





## SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Adaptive Design Association • Advocates for Children of New York • AHRC New York City • The Bronx Defenders • Bronx Independent Living Services • Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled • Brooklyn Defender Services • Center for Hearing and Communication • Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York • Citizens' Committee for Children of New York • Citywide Council on High Schools • Citywide Council on Special Education • Citywide District 75 Council • Coalition for Educational Justice • Collaborative for Inclusive Education • The Cooke School and Institute • Disability Rights New York • Dyslexia (Plus) Task Force • The Go Project • Goddard Riverside Community Center • INCLUDEnyc • The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State • Lenox Hill Neighborhood House • The Mental Health Association of New York • Metropolitan Parent Center of Sinergia, Inc. • Mobilization for Justice, Inc. • National Economic and Social Rights Initiative • New Alternatives for Children • New York Lawyers for the Public Interest • New York Legal Assistance Group • New York Performance Standards Consortium • Parents for Inclusive Education • Parent to Parent of New York State • Parent to Parent New York, Inc. • Partnership for the Homeless, Education Rights Project • Promise Project • Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project • Teach For America – New York • United Federation of Teachers • United We Stand • Unity Preparatory Charter School of Brooklyn • Vibrant Emotional Health • Wishes of Literacy

## INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Ursula Abbott Connolly • Cathy Albisa • Steven J. Alizio, Esq., M.S.Ed • Mark Alter, *Steinhardt School of Culture, Education & Human Development, New York University* • David C. Bloomfield, *Professor of Education, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center* • Bay Brown • Tamesha Coleman • Ziograin (Zio) Correa, Sr., M.S.Ed • April Coughlin, *School of Education, SUNY New Paltz* • Susan Crawford, *Director, The Right to Read Project* • Sahre Davis, *Parent/Community Advocate* • Amber Decker, *Peer Family Advocate* • Ruth DiRoma • Richard and Lora Ellenson • Yuvania Espino • Esther Klein Friedman, Ph. D • Ramona Garcia • Ruth Genn • Olga C. Gonzalez • Jay Gottlieb, *New York University* • Tiesha Groover • Emily Hellstrom • Paul Hutchinson • Patricia Jewett • Donna Johnson • Revere Joyce • Joseph Karam • Jeannine Kiely • Laura Kennedy • Rebecca Kostyuchenko • Mylinda Lee • NeQuan C. McLean • Aurelia Mack • Matthew Mandelbaum • Shelly McGuinness • Diana Mendez • Rodrigo Mora • Elise Murphy • Srikala Naraian, *Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University* • Dana Neider • Michelle Noris • Kathleen Nowak • Jaclyn Okin Barney, Esq. • Samantha Pownall • Cathy Rikhye, Ed.D., *Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University* • Raphael Rivas • Melanie Rivera-Mora • Marilyn Rubinstein • Miguel L. Salazar • Jennifer and Peter Sellar • Iriss Shimony • Jon Sigall • Jo Anne Simon, *Jo Anne Simon, P.C.* • Karin Spraggs • Mark Surabian, MA, ATP, *Instructor, Assistive Technologies, Pace Graduate School of Education* • Tanzea Taylor • Constance Van Rolleghe • RueZalia Watkins • Chevion Weaks-Lopez, *Queens High School Presidents' Council* •

My school, Midwood High School, is filled with about 4,000 students. It saddens me to hear that there will be only 1 class of AP Environmental Science, 1 class of AP Physics, and who knows how many less in other departments. Although I may not know what is going on inside your offices, I do know what is going on inside my school's hallways.

I know that there are crowded hallways that make it difficult to get to class on time. I know that there are competitive and ambitious students who are driven for higher education. I know that students complain about not getting individual attention because of the large class sizes and simply because one teacher has about 100 students. I know that a lot of students want to take AP classes and want to go to school, despite the fact that we may complain about it. I know that we look forward to this form of college preparation because its one of the few forms that is offered to us.

I'm asking that you place more funding in students now. Now in a time where students need extra help. Now in a time where students are becoming more worried about family financial problems than test scores. Now in a time where you and I can see the disparities between different communities are becoming much more evident. The DOE has been doing something and we see it. The distribution of iPads was something, and as a member of a low-income community, I am so grateful. But are you going to stop there? Students are going to need more instruction in the following school year. Will you give it to them?

**Marlen Mendieta-Camaron**

# YOU HAVE SKILLS

Evaluating What Skills You Can Bring to Radical Organizing

*[This zine is adapted from Eden's Solo Praxis segment of the  
Frontline Praxis Podcast, episode 1.*

*Please see [www.FrontlinePraxis.com](http://www.FrontlinePraxis.com) for more information.]*

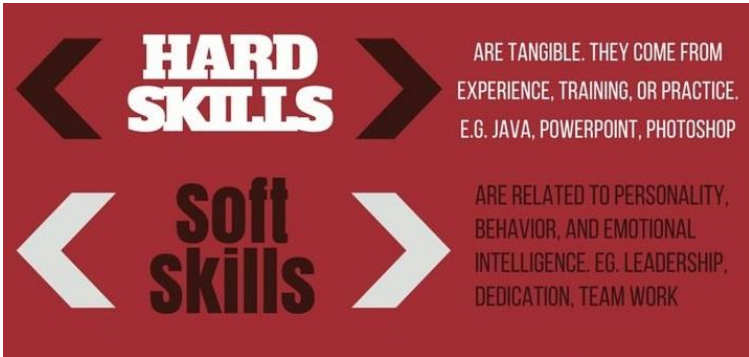
It's really easy when looking at the big picture of organizing, to not know where to start or how to help. It can get debilitating and paralyzing. And I, as somebody with anxiety, definitely look at the big picture sometimes and don't know what to do or how to help and end up getting frozen. Sometimes I don't help because I don't know where to go.



Part of being comfortable giving, volunteering, and working in solidarity with people is knowing how you can give. We are going to talk about different ways that you can look at your skills so you know exactly how you can help. With the combination of knowing your skills and knowing your boundaries, you can fully, enthusiastically consent to whatever you are signing up for.



Not all organizing is intense or glamorous. Skills come from all over. You may not even realize you have skills that can be used for mutual aid organizing. Often, we think only specific skills are used in mutual aid organizing. This is not necessarily the case. We need more than just rally speakers, meeting leaders, and flier makers.



First of all, what do you think of off the top of your head of things that you are good at? What are you proud of, that you know you do well? What is your ideal way to show up and help a friend or organization?

If you were imagining there was a project happening in your area, think of an ideal 30 minutes of time volunteering, what would that look like? Would it be helping greet people as they come in? Giving a training? Signing up people? Cooking in a kitchen? Would it be handing out fliers? Would it be yelling in a fascist's face? Look at what you would think you would feel the most comfortable doing inside of an organization.

You can look at the skills you use in the workforce. What tools do you use? Do you know how to handle construction equipment and build? Do you work on a computer and can organize spreadsheets? Do you handle customer service and sales? Do you have interpersonal skills like conflict resolution, training, coordinating, team building, delegation, or research? What are things that you would put on your resume? I can guarantee you almost everything I have on my resume, I could definitely tool towards mutual aid organizing.



I could put my writing skills into information on a website. I could use my graphic design background on making posters. I could create online forms. I could organize conference calls. There are a lot of different things that we can use from our resumes that can also go into mutual aid organizing. Knowing that you have those skills in your back pocket is really important.



For those of you in school, or recently out of school, what skills do you remember? What techniques did you learn? Bet there was research! What about writing? Dealing with authority? Learning how to work with teachers to find their expectations can easily apply to figuring out the expectations of others that you are going to run into in organizing.

Group projects? Speaking? Were there specific skills that you learned in your classes that they taught you? Were you in a technical program where you learned things that could be applied in a variety of situations?





You can look at what hobbies you have. Which of your skills from your hobbies can be applied? Do you cook? Can you build things? Do you like to write? Do you like to make music? Are you big into outdoor survival? There are so many things that we often do in our spare time, that we find a lot of joy in, that are not commodified under capitalism, but are still very valuable skills when we are working in community with others.

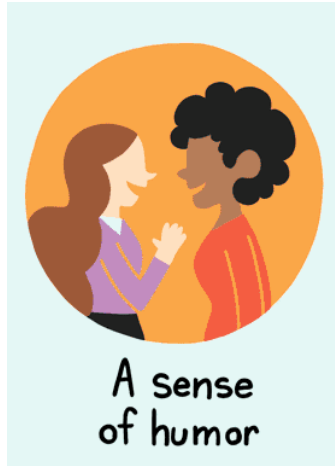
Don't forget to look at what other people tell you that you are good at. If you are ever talking with friends or co-workers and somebody comments, "you're really good at explaining things," or "you are really good at finding those detailed questions," or "you are really good at rallying a crowd." Often times we don't look at ourselves the same way that people around us see us. Sometimes others can be a really good resource in finding out what you're good at.



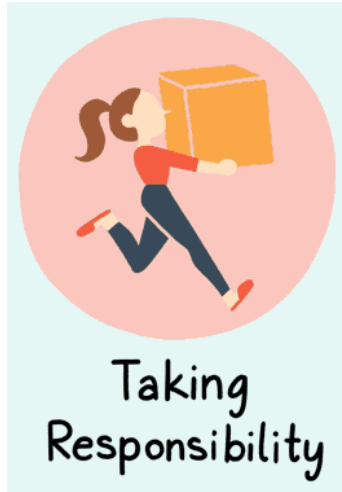
Are there things that you volunteer yourself to do within your family or friend dynamics? If you are making plans for a get-together, vacation, or party with your family or friends, is there something that you usually bring to the picture? Are you the person that makes the menu and coordinates food? Are you the person that likes to book the flights? Or the person that likes to find the activities? Are you the person who is really just great at bringing everybody's mood up and getting everybody hyped? Those are things that you can bring into mutual aid organizing.



What skills have you learned or used with your family? A lot of people undervalue many of the skills that we develop inside of familial situations, especially for people who were gendered female in their childhood. There are a lot of skills that we learned, in managing family dynamics, in cooking, cleaning, sewing, or crafting that can easily be applied. If those are things that you like, you enjoy, and you've cultivated a skill at, definitely bring that to the organizing.



When you see a project that you want to help on, it's a really great idea to think about these skills. It's good to have these already evaluated so you're aware, then when an organizational opportunity pops up, you can go and say, I have this list of skills, where can I apply them to help with this movement? Where can I use my skills of technical writing? Where can I use my skills of gardening? Where can I use my skills of team building? That way you fit into the mechanisms that are already in place. Then you know, hey I'm going to volunteer for something I already know I'm good at, and that helps everyone. You are able to do something that you are confident in, that you don't feel like you are going to mess up, which means you are more likely to volunteer in the first place. It also gives direction to other people because they are able to see how what your skills are applicable and how that can be spread around the community.



In conclusion, I think it's a really great idea, even if you are totally alone, out in the middle of nowhere, to just take inventory of what skills you have. So that when opportunity knocks, you have a set list that you can go and you can say "hey, I'm really good at this. Let me help you," or "hey, I can do A, B, and C, but not really D, E, or F, where can I fit into this picture?"



It gives a lot more direction to existing organizers, than somebody who comes up and says, "I want to volunteer." While that is always appreciated, when somebody knows what they can do and how they can contribute, it really helps.

It makes it easier for all parties to be enthusiastically involved and engaged with delegating out assignments. If they know that you are comfortable in a role, it gives other people the ability to trust you more and gives yourself the ability to fully consent to something.

If we are really hesitant, nervous, or if we feel like we are doing something more out of obligation, than we are enthusiastically consenting, then we really don't put our best work into it, and we don't feel the safest that we could be.

At the end of the day, we need to build these revolutionary relationships with each other as comrades. Part of that is understanding what you can bring to the table as yourself, so that other people don't have to pull it out of you. So that we can all feel safe and in community together.



# Transferable Skills Checklist

Check off those skills you already have...

## Interpersonal skills

able to interact successfully with a wide range of people; knows how to interpret and use body language

## Oral communication skills

presents information and ideas clearly and concisely, with content and style appropriate for the audience (whether one-to-one or in a group); presents opinions and ideas in an open, objective way

## Public speaking skills

able to make formal presentations; presents ideas, positions and problems in an interesting way

## Counseling skills

responds to what others have said in a non-judgmental way ("active listening"); builds trust and openness with others

## Coaching / mentoring skills

gives feedback in a constructive way; helps others to increase their knowledge or skills

## Teaching / training skills

able to help others gain knowledge and skills; able to create an effective learning environment

## Supervising skills

delegates responsibilities and establishes an appropriate system of accountability; able to monitor progress and assess the quality of job performance of others

## Leadership skills

motivates and empowers others to act; inspires trust and respect in others

## Persuading skills

communicates effectively to justify a position or influence a decision; able to sell products or promote ideas

## Negotiating skills

able to negotiate skillfully; knows how and when to make compromises

## Mediation skills

able to resolve conflicts that stems from different perspectives or interests; able to deal with conflict in an open, honest and positive way

## Interviewing skills

asks and responds to questions effectively; able to make others feel relaxed and to create a feeling of trust

## Customer service skills

able to build a relationship of mutual trust with clients; able to handle complaints and concerns in a sensitive way

## Care-giving skills

able to empathize with others; able to give sensitive care to people who are sick or elderly or who have severe disabilities

## Analytical / logical thinking skills

able to draw specific conclusions from a set of general observations or from a set of specific facts; able to synthesize information and ideas

## Critical thinking skills

able to review different points of view or ideas and make objective judgments; investigates all possible solutions to a problem, weighing the pros and cons

## Creative thinking skills

able to generate new ideas, invent new things, create new images or designs; find new solutions to problems; able to use wit and humor effectively

## Problem-solving skills

able to clarify the nature of a problem, evaluate alternatives, propose viable solutions and determine the outcome of the various options

## Decision-making skills

able to identify all possible options, weigh the pros and cons, assess feasibility and choose the most viable option

## Planning skills

able to plan projects, events and programs; able to establish objectives and needs, evaluates options, chooses best option

## Organizational skills

able to organize information, people or things in a systematic way; able to establish priorities and meet deadlines

## Advanced writing skills

able to select, interpret, organize and synthesize key ideas; able to edit a written text to ensure that the message is as clear, concise and accurate as possible

## Research skills

knows how to find and collect relevant background information; able to analyze data, summarize findings and write a report

## Financial skills

able to keep accurate financial records; able to manage a budget (that is, preparing sound budgets and monitoring expenses)

## Language skills

functionally bilingual; able to translate and/or interpret in a given language

## Advanced computer skills

able to use a variety of software programs; knowledge about desk-top publishing or web design

## Technological skills

understands technical systems and operates effectively within them; understands technical specifications; reads technical manuals with ease

## Performing skills

able to make presentations for video or television in an interesting way; able to entertain, amuse and inspire an audience

## Artistic skills

uses color and design creatively; able to design displays and publicity material (print, video, Internet)

## Perceptual skills

able to visualize new formats and shapes; able to estimate physical space

## Mechanical skills

able to install, operate and monitor the performance of equipment and mechanical devices; able to repair mechanical devices

## Adaptability skills

capacity to adapt to new situations and settings and to tolerate change well; flexibility to adapt to the needs of the moment

## Administrative / clerical skills

able to operate computers and other basic office equipment; able to design and maintain filing and control systems

Maureen Silverman

# Meghan Grover

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Meghan Grover, and I work for New York City Children's Theater as a teaching artist.

Every year, New York City Children's Theater serves over 10,000 students with inclusive theatre and music programs that advance literacy and social-emotional skills in Pre-K-5th graders at schools and homeless shelters in all 5 boroughs. We are dedicated to serving every New York City student, and have designed original programming to serve special populations, including students with disabilities and MLL's.

Currently, 40 New York City Children's Theater Teaching Artists are working to develop innovative and engaging virtual programming:

- We are currently running 20 long-term residencies with our school and homeless shelter partners, and creating a database of online programming named "Creative Clubhouse" that will serve the wider public online.
- We have adapted our multi-media musical, FIVE, to digital format, and are offering it for free to schools in District 75, the special needs district.
- We are developing a series of trauma-informed training webinars for educators so that they can learn how to handle the lasting effects of this collective trauma on students, and help to provide stability for their students.
- We are also creating a new applied theatre workshop for grades K through 4 that teaches skills in resilience, mindfulness, and anxiety management through traumatic experiences.

New York City Children's Theater relies heavily on the grant programs that we receive each year from DCLA and the DOE. Without this funding, our organization would be unable to deliver our arts programming to schools and homeless shelters at this time when the arts is imperative for healthy child development.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Meghan Grover



## **Preface:**

Here is a collection of youth testimonies from the organization PoliFem. We are a newly founded org that aims to empower femmes who want to become politicians.

## **Introduction:**

*Meril Mousoom*  
*Founder of PoliFem*  
*Sixteen years old*

The Lost Generation was the generation of people who grew up facing the horrors of World War I. Books such as “The Great Gatsby” showcases the disillusionment and depressive spirit of this group. It’s no wonder that many of the notable figures like Ernest Hemingway died by suicide, still grieving the horrific time of their youth.

We have another lost generation: the group of which I am a part of. The mental health crisis facing our youth has been elaborated on repeatedly during the Education hearing, and will be echoed throughout the following testimonies.

At the core of the problem is the loss of control that the youth have experienced. We could not control the virus. We could not control the lockdown. But most of all, we could not control our education.

We have suffered for two whole months of continuous assignments. We work through panic attacks, depressive spirals, suicide attempts. Afraid to tell the world of our pain. Death comes and goes, each time creeping closer.

When a 16 year old anorexic blacks out for a day, she has to get permission from her nine teachers to declare herself “sick.” She has to face her intelligence being undermined in the form of her dropping GPA because of the inevitable late assignments. She has to fight the scorn of teachers who do not believe in mental illness, anonymity being dammed.

Before, she could take a day off to check in with her therapist, to get the help that she needs. She would not have to breach her own privacy with no attacks to her GPA. But with math homework due at 11:59 pm, who has the time?

Social workers to tackle this are much needed in the long term. But this is a crisis that needs immediate, short term response. The six billion budget deficit New York City faces also requires a cost effective solution as well.

It’s a common saying that we live in unprecedented times. But what is not emphasized is that we need unprecedented solutions.

**We propose a daily attendance checker on the DOE website for each student. If a student does not check in, they would be considered absent by the school and not held accountable for their work until they come back to school. This portal would be accessible with the teachers of the students, who would be grading the work submitted by students.**

It sounds radical. But I ask you this, is it radical to seek the light in the darkness that we are trapped in? Is it radical to use our status as a global city to set a new precedent for mental illness treatment?

There are worries that “lazy” students might abuse this system through repeated absences. Yet people forget that for us youth, school is our only escape from our Rapunzel-like enforced quarantine. Deprived of the adult privilege of going out to do things like shopping for groceries, we all want to learn Spanish. In fact, remote learning has proven to engage many students with a previous record of cutting class. Students with social anxiety are also uplifted, being able to find their voices in the classroom for the first time.

While New York City is taking steps to reopen and school instruction will end on June 12, many students will still be quarantined with summer instruction. Quarantine may still continue into the new school year.

Every day that the city fails to enact this, another youth struggling with mental illness will face more pain and misery. It is with this collective pain and misery of the new Lost Generation that youth suicides have reached a twenty year high.

We implore you, City Council, to adopt this resolution, to put an end to the suffering, the misery, and ultimately, the suicide that has resulted from insufficient remote learning policy.

## **Part Two**

*Anna Ast  
PoliFem member  
Sixteen years old*

The coronavirus pandemic is an especially difficult time for many people. Families, medical workers, essential workers, and others are all experiencing hardships right now, but one group of people usually more overlooked than the rest are students. During this time, students are all experiencing different situations at home. These situations can relate to relatives, mental health, finances, etc., but throughout all this, students are still expected to attend school and are given large loads of homework every day. Although restrictions regarding homework and attending online class have been loosened, there is still a tremendous pressure on students brought on by school right now. Previously, when faced with large pressures at school, a student was able to take a day off or a “mental-health day” in order to catch up with work or take some time to relax.

Now with online school, students are deprived of the opportunity to do so adding stress to many students' lives.

Personally, I am feeling the effects of this added stress like many other students. Prior to the pandemic, at times when I felt overwhelmed at school with my workload, I was usually able to just stay home for one day to gather myself and catch up on work. This was such a relief for me as I was able to de-stress and make sure that I did better in school in the following days. Now, there is no opportunity for me to do so. I feel overwhelmed as many teachers have increased the workload given out for their classes. I have heard concerns from many other students as well about increased workloads, and increased pressure from school due to this. If I could have, I would definitely have taken a mental health day by now, as some days I was given so much work that I was forced to get 3 hours of sleep. However, some other students are experiencing even worse situations right now and are still faced with the expectation of attending online classes, and submitting homework. The mental strain that students are experiencing is sadly not often mentioned. I believe that right now students deserve the right to be able to take a mental health day, and that it should be normalized in general. They should not be punished or feel frustrated due to events outside of their control. Therefore, I truly believe that the allowance of mental health days are essential to a student's well being.

### **Part Three:**

*Lyla Velez*  
*PoliFem member*  
*Fifteen years old*

Mental health is something that is not spoken about enough which can lead to ignorance within humanity. I had a personal experience of how not discussing mental health led to incredible hardship. I live in a Hispanic family, meaning that the belief of mental illness being a sign of weakness is common. My older sister suffered most of her adolescent life with my family not even considering the fact that she needed serious help. Instead, my sister was labeled as a "bad kid" until she spiraled so badly she was institutionalized and used dangerous coping mechanisms. She had fallen into the path of drugs and underage drinking because proper help was not provided for her. The drugs caused her mental health to suffer, and consequently, our family endured constant chaos and fighting within our home. It was only a few years ago that my sister was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and it was not an easy road. However, if people were educated on mental illness, like my parents, then the fighting could have been avoided. My sister was in and out of hospitals feeling trapped, and no one could understand her actions or what she was going through. Ultimately, my sister was sent to receive mental treatment at a residential center after sixteen years of living her life with a disorder but without help. When my sister suffered, so did my family. My mom fell into a deep depressive state and had to take medication. Mental health needs to be spoken about and advocated for so families, such as mine, do not have to endure the painful process of sending away one of their family members.

Mental health is not only associated with mental illness but also with the state of mind of a person. After everything that happened with my sister, I was traumatized. I experienced a lot of PTSD symptoms, like waking up scared in the middle of the night because I had a nightmare

about a recurring situation my family went through. I had also stopped feeling emotions at points in my life to the point where I could not cry anymore. However, family therapy made some positive changes with educating my family about how to handle these situations and helping us to learn how to recover. Mental health is not something that can be quickly fixed but rather a very long journey filled with both ups and downs. Therapy was helpful, but also an incredibly new experience for me. When I began to feel emotions after immense therapeutic help, I was quickly overwhelmed. I fell into a deep depressive state, like not having the power to just get out of bed. Although therapy helped me forgive my sister, I never forgot the nightmares or the depression, or the painful memories. I suffered in silence because I did not want to concern my family. I felt as if my sister had already put them through enough. Nonetheless, I learned that mental health is not a burden, and no one should feel bad for needing or asking for help. I got my own therapist, and even though I still suffer from depressive modes, I have learned how to deal with them. I am still trying to get better because my mental health is not where I would like it to be. However, I know that therapy which includes speaking and learning from my experiences has helped me.

I still live with pain, and my journey of ups and downs is not complete. I believe that the immense pressure of expectations also made my mind suffer in the end. I have always been a hard worker, and when my sister was institutionalized, I threw myself into work. I was suffering unconsciously: I gained a colossal amount of weight, I got extremely sick with pneumonia and the flu, and I never slept. In addition, perfectionism is something I have always suffered from, but now it has developed into two distinct voices in my head. I get so overwhelmed with these voices that sometimes all I can do is cry. I feel as if I am battling two voices constantly, with one telling me I'm worthless and the other one telling me I can do anything I put my mind to. When I received my report card, I had the highest grade in my entire school year, but I started to nitpick. I told myself how worthless I am, and I started to cry and shut everyone out of my life because I felt as if I disappointed them. I was told to be the best when I was younger, and when I do not meet my expectations, I let it tear me apart.

Mental health comes in many different forms but in the end it is all just as equally important. Everyone suffers from some painful time of instability which dramatically affects their mental health, whether it be as extreme as an actual illness or low self confidence; though, both are mind altering situations that are not given the proper attention today in society. We need to recognize this issue because it has such an enormous power over our emotional state today. We need to bring this subject to light. For that reason, I sincerely hope that City Council will strongly consider allowing students to declare their own absences for the sake of their mental health, uplifting and validating the struggles of my sister and I.

#### **Part Four**

*Victoria Lieberman*  
*Member of PoliFem*  
*Seventeen years old*

Everyday that I've gone to school from kindergarten to the middle of my junior year of high school, teachers have taken attendance or I've had to sign in marking me present for the day. In 3rd grade, I had strep throat a couple times and so, I didn't go to school and that was that. I was

sick and I didn't have to do work that day. This has always been an option. If I need to miss a day of school, I do and I come in the next day and get the work to makeup the classwork and homework, so why should that change now? The DOE has been trying to keep school as normal as possible, so why should this common practice of attendance be stopped? With everything changing, more and more students are feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of living through a pandemic. This makes work more difficult and sometimes, students need a mental health day where they should not be required to do work, no questions asked. They would be able to make up the work in the following days, just like normal school. This option has always been available for students in NYC public schools and during this difficult time, that should not change. I would appreciate being able to have a day to rest and not worry about an insurmountable amount of work and I know that the millions of other students in the public school system would too.

*Final Ask:*

**We propose a daily attendance checker on the DOE website for each student. If a student does not check in, they would be considered absent by the school and not held accountable for their work until they come back to school. This portal would be accessible with the teachers of the students, who would be grading the work submitted by students.**

# **New York City Council**

## **AT-PROMISE YOUTH ARE NOT EXPENDABLE AND NEITHER ARE THOSE WHO SERVE THEM**

May 27, 2020

Testimony Presented By  
Michael De Vito Jr.  
Associate Executive Director  
NYCID



Good morning Councilmembers:

I'm Michael DeVito from New York Center for Interpersonal Development on Staten Island. We are Richmond County's Conflict Dispute Resolution Center and we improve lives every day by building community and nurturing personal growth.

First, thank you, councilmembers for your attention and your efforts to figure out a way through this unprecedented emergency.

I am not going to share anything that you don't already know. In fact, by now you've undoubtedly heard the painful realities we face so many times you've probably begun to process it as noise. We are all feeling this way, much like how we all began to shut out the repeated images of planes hitting our towers over and over; and how we turned off our internet when we could no longer stand to see people being thrown out of their homes in 2008. What I hope to do in this little bit of time on my soapbox is to convince you all that at-risk youth are not expendable – they are your priority, and the entities that serve them are your saving grace.

It will come as no surprise that NYCID stands with our #savesummer advocates and that we must fund SYEP, SONYC, COMPASS and Cornerstones. But that's not all: in this pitch you also get the chance to protect Transfer schools, Young Adult Borough Centers and Pathways to Graduation programs that offer not just opportunity to our City's most vulnerable but the people who support them in creating a plans and setting goals; not just a seat at the table but a paycheck for their meals; not just a piece of paper but a way to contribute to the greater good of New York City and America by becoming taxpayers.

I raise my voice today because we've endured deep deep cuts in the last decade – in some programs as much as 55%! – and yet we have forged on. A while back I reported to this committee that the partnerships that CBOs like NYCID have with the City have saved the Big Apple BILLIONS. Here's the figure that has been presented over the years to many of these committees: It is \$325,000 - that's the aggregated figure presented by Northeastern University and the Community Service Society,

*“in lifetime budgetary terms, ‘each individual without a high school diploma represents a net cost to New York City of \$134,037, whereas each New Yorker with a high school diploma or GED yields a net benefit of \$192,715 – a swing of*

*more than \$325,000 per person.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the aggregate, simply helping one low-skilled New Yorker earn a high school degree or equivalency is worth more than \$325,000 to the city.<sup>2</sup>*

In the last 20 years we have helped more than **15,000** New Yorkers obtain a high school diploma. That's \$4.9 **billion** dollars of net benefit for our city.

As you move forward, you must remember this number. You must remember that your community-based organizations are easy targets. We don't have unions. We serve at the behest of the City. We keep saying "yes" because we can't say no to those we serve.

You must remember that Nonprofit organizations do our city's heavy lifting, as we not only build healthy communities, we are providing the critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility of our city.

And please note, that this 4.9 Billion figure also doesn't account for the dollars we save you from keeping young people out of our prison system, avoiding homelessness, and/or addiction. This figure doesn't account for the unaccountable cases of us not just improving lives; rather we are **SAVING** lives.

So I am not going to bore you with more figures. What I will implore you to do is to double down. We need you to turn over every stone and find a way through that doesn't cost any more than we **CANNOT** afford already. It will be a generation of kids you leave behind and an entire industry that you drop in the basket with the trash if you do not protect the dollars that help us do what **ONLY** we can do.

We can do more with less to a point, but we cannot do anything with nothing.

In the Marines we say that we are only as fast as the slowest Marine. I implore you all now to remember that we are only successful when we give opportunity and access to every New Yorker and American.

Leave no one behind.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Service Society, From Basic Skills to Better Futures: Generating Economic Dividends for New York City at 9 (Sept. 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Id. at 1.





dances for a variable population

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## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 23, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Naomi Goldberg Haas and I am the Founder and Artistic Director of Dances For A Variable Population in Harlem.

The mission of Dances For A Variable Population is bring strong and creative movement to older adults that supports wellness, happiness, and health. Dances For A Variable Population annually serves over 2,500 older adults throughout four boroughs of NYC with weekly programs of classes and large scale performances.

This spring, Dances For A Variable Population moved very rapidly to provide remote programming for our communities. We launched our first video program March 17 (<https://www.dvpnyc.org/free-access-videos/>). We began offering Zoom-based classes on March 23 (with a Zoom tutorial for those new to the platform), and now offer **14 classes a week, 7 days a week** (<https://www.dvpnyc.org/on-line-zoom-classes/>). We launched daily telephone-based classes for participants without internet access on April 6., which has been wildly popular for older adults without internet, with 40-50 participants in each phone conference class (<http://www.dvpnyc.org/phone-classes/>). Our **remote programs have an attendance of over 350 seniors each week, with 20-40 students in each virtual class, and our videos have had nearly 4,000 views** (<http://www.dvpnyc.org/free-access-videos/>).

The older adults we serve are primarily living alone, are highly vulnerable to COVID-19, and lack other outlets for physical exercise and social connections. Even before this pandemic pushed society in social isolation, loneliness was at epidemic levels affecting 60-80% of the population. Recognizing that loneliness decreases life span by 26% exceeding the risks of death associated with obesity, physical activity and air pollution, programs that mitigate this life-threatening condition are essential at this time. The programs offered by DVP are and will continue to offset social isolation among older adults with your continued support.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department for the Aging, Department of Cultural Affairs, which fund our programs, or on the Department of Education or Department of Youth & Community Development, which we know provide additional critical support to colleague organizations who serve our communities. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for senior services, arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city.

Programs like ours maintain the physical and mental health of New York City's most vulnerable older population at this critical time. We are a small nonprofit, and we are expanding our programs virtually at this time because of our understanding of the profound need of the community we serve. Loss of New York City funding for our programs at this time would have a devastating impact on our organization. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

In appreciation for all you are doing for your constituents at this difficult time,

*Naomi Goldberg Haas*

Naomi Goldberg Haas

Founder and Artistic Director

## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education during the Education Council's meeting. My name is Nelle Stokes, and I am the Founding Executive Director of Magic Box Productions.

Magic Box's mission is to prepare young people to navigate the world with curiosity, collaboration, and a critical lens. Since our founding in 2006, we have guided over 20000 students, teachers and parents in the exploration of photography, documentary, animation and audio. Media arts offer a perfect way to ready our students for an ever-changing global society, by teaching what are called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, or the 4 c's: , critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity.

Since the onslaught of Covid19, our students, artists and teachers have working remotely, using technology to spur new thinking and engagement, and to spark creativity and energy during a time when many feel afraid and isolated. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations like ours are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. For this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Many of our students live in neighborhoods that are struggling. In the words of one administrator, 'they are in the epicenter of the epicenter.' The city's most recent budget cuts directly affect these young people, and their future.

Let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Countless NYC youth have discovered a passion for media arts, and built important life skills that help them in the future through our work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Nelle Stokes  
Executive Director

**Niae Knight**  
**383 Carlton Avenue, #8E**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11238**

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
5/27/20

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Niae Knight, and I work as Theater Educator and Teaching Artist for several arts organizations in Brooklyn. I am also the Mother of two children who attend public schools in Brooklyn.

The mission of my work as a theatre teacher is to ensure that students have access to the performing arts within stimulating and positive learning environments. The arts possess an extraordinary power to enrich and strengthen a student's education. Students involved in drama performance coursework outscored non-arts students on the 2005 SAT by an average of 65 points in the verbal component and 34 points in the math component. Students who perform Shakespeare texts show improvements in understanding of other complex texts including science and math material. In one in-school playwriting program, students demonstrating an Exemplary or Proficient skill (in using elements of language such as spelling or diction to communicate character traits) rose from 34 to 63 percent over the course of one semester. Additionally, studies show that drama helps to improve school attendance and reduce high school dropout rates. This has also been demonstrated by the fact that low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

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programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Niae Knight

**Nicole Cohen**  
**528 16<sup>th</sup> Street #2, Brooklyn NY 11215**  
**Parent of First Grader at PS 154 in District 15**

**TESTIMONY FOR SUBMISSION – Committee on Education - Oversight - Remote Learning: The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the City's Schools.**

**SPOKEN - TESTIMONY**

My name is Nicole Cohen and I am the parent of a nearly 7-year-old boy who goes to P.S. 154 in Windsor Terrace Brooklyn. First, I want to commend the leadership at our school, especially Jason Foreman and our first-grade teachers. Their leadership has been incredible and helped us as a family immensely during this trying time.

I'm here to say that technology is not the answer to the question: how do we educate elementary students next fall. Emergency remote learning has been a useful workaround during this unthinkable situation. Our teachers have done a great job at parsing out the modules into daily and weekly assignments and giving my son the opportunity to engage 1:1 with them. Despite having access to this and the opportunity to self-pace, his interest waned and our fights increased. It turns out, part of what my son loves about learning is sharing what he's learned with other kids. He, like me, does not like video conferencing. In the last few months, my precocious, curious kid went from being zealous about school to having frequent meltdowns and yelling "I want to quit school forever." I don't blame video conferencing alone – this is an exceptionally lonely time for a child – but it assures me that teaching a child in isolation through a computer is not the answer.

For us, a well-resourced family, it has been difficult for a number of reasons that remind us each day why in-person instruction, reduced teacher/student ratios, increased emotional curriculum, PE, recess, art and music are essential to children's educational development. Also, if you ask any parent in the neighborhood how they are doing, they will all remark in the first few minutes: they are failing at home schooling and feel terrible about it, letting themselves down and their kids. It is discouraging.

We need a safe solution. I know there are many hurdles and many lives have already been lost. But screens are not the answer. Bringing kids and teachers safely back to the classroom will take work, ingenuity, creativity, compassion, patience and extra hands (even grief counselors, I imagine). But I believe that the same resolve that we, as rugged and proud New Yorkers, brought to flattening the curve, can bring to solving this problem of opening the schools for our kids this fall. Schools around the world are opening up to allow kids the opportunity to learn. We should hold ourselves accountable to our children and plan for the same outcome.

Trust is the bedrock of community. Responding to this pandemic with further isolation and relying on technology to teach our children sends the message that we are not resilient enough to face our fears and reconnect. Above all, I want to raise a resilient and community-minded person. For that, he needs to be at school with other children. Not in front of a screen.

###

**Nicole Cohen**  
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With that out of the way, I'm here to say that technology is not the answer to the question about how do we educate elementary students next fall. Emergency remote learning has been a useful workaround during this unthinkable situation. For us, a well-resourced family, it has been trying for a number of reasons that remind us each day why in-person instruction, reduced teacher/student ratios, increased emotional curriculum, PE, recess, art and music are essential to children's educational development.

Bringing kids and teachers back to the classroom will take work, compassion, patience and extra hands (even grief counselors, I imagine). We can't write it off as an option or move forward with the emergency distance learning in its current form. But I believe that the same resolve that we, as rugged and proud New Yorkers, brought to flattening the curve, can bring to solving this problem and either find a way to open the schools for our kids this fall or find a way to make remote learning work. We should hold ourselves accountable to our children and plan for an outcome that works for them, not just us. We need to work together on this – the department of health, ACS, the governor, the legal team, parents and students of all ages – to create an interdisciplinary approach and use the summer to plan and think this through. Let's use our sway as the largest US school system and engage vendors to tailor their products to our needs and ask municipalities in Europe, what is working and what isn't. If you need a parent, sign me up! I want to find a way to help make this work because as it is currently structured, emergency distance learning isn't working for my first grader or me.

**Emotional Cues:**

Once the novelty of Zoom (and then Google Meet) wore off, these daily video conferences became fodder for fights. He often turned off the camera and then eventually fought me on joining sessions. As an adult, I find it challenging to read cues on video conference calls and prefer phone calls. I see my son tuning out of his morning zoom meetings, unsure who to focus on and what to look at and usually chatting with a friend in the background or just asking or begging to log off altogether. While the teachers do a tremendous job of engaging the students daily, it is not a platform that is conducive to collective engagement.

**Academics:**

Our teachers have done a great job at parsing out the modules into daily and weekly assignments and giving my son the opportunity to engage 1:1 with them once a week on writing. Despite having access to this and the opportunity to self-pace, his interest waned as time went on. It turns out, part of what my son loves about learning is teaching others. He loves to share what he's learned with other kids. He, like me, does not like video conferencing. But, in the last few months, my precocious curious kid went from being zealous about school to having frequent meltdowns and yelling "I want to quit school forever". I don't blame video conferencing alone –

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this is an exceptionally lonely time for a child – but it assures me that teaching a child in isolation through a computer is not the answer. My son is someone who learns best when he can teach others. It has been great seeing him help others with reading and math in his class. What has been difficult is watching him become withdrawn in areas like writing – where he is strong but has no peers to model off of.

**Socialization:**

“The classroom provides stability and routine, Hicks said. It’s also a critical place for learning and socialization.” (Roanoke Times, 05/18/20, [Emergency distance learning shows value of support, stability in the classroom](#)). My son thrives in a routine. It is something I’ve loved about the classrooms he’s been in since pre-k. They’ve encouraged him to tether his wild spirit to an order and shown the benefit when everyone works together in unison. That has come undone. And with it, the socialization of seeing others do things and copying them and learning and teaching and the beautiful ecosystem that our teachers strive to create. I have a lot of strengths as a parent. During this time, I’ve prioritized my mental health, my son’s emotional wellbeing and at times our routines have gone out the window. A daily zoom meeting can’t replace that. If anything, fewer students in the classroom and less testing will allow teachers to cultivate the environments that will best support the learning styles of the students within the classroom. At a minimum, my son misses his friends. More importantly, we miss our community: the paraprofessionals, recess coaches, after school teachers, administrators and teachers who bring the elementary school to life for my son and make it a place where he learns about boundaries, behaviors, connections and camaraderie.

**No More Screens:**

I am not against screen time. There is a difference between watching a narrative unfold on a screen in front of you and spending your entire day in front of a screen. The internet is overridden with articles about the problem with sitting in front of a computer all day. Why are we looking for opportunities to swap out human interaction for screen time? This pandemic has been awful in countless ways. The answer; however, is not to respond by pulling back and isolating further. We need to find creative ways to bring kids to together safely so they can play, socialize, learn from one another and grow together IRL.

**Movement!**

If there was ever an argument to keep PE and recess, now is the time. We’ve all become a bit afraid to go outside. I find myself seizing with anxiety up when I see a lot of people in Prospect Park. I know my son has said he feels safest at home in the apartment. We need a safe solution. But screens are not the answer. Finding creative ways to get our kids moving outside together so they can imagine, create and compete is important. Trust is the bedrock of community. Responding to this pandemic with further isolation and relying on technology to teach our children sends the message that we are not resilient enough to face our fears and reconnect. Above all, I want to raise a resilient and community-minded person. For that, he needs to be at school with other children. Not in front of a screen.

Nicole Hogsett

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 20, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Nicole Hogsett, and I work at New York City Children's Theater based in Manhattan, but serving families and students in all five boroughs.

The mission of New York City Children's Theater is to promote children's literacy and social development through theater productions and arts in education programming. Our programming fosters empathy and creativity across the city. These qualities are more vital now, more than ever.

Our organization has immediately jumped into action following the spread of COVID-19. Our Education Department has designed original programming to serve special populations, including students with disabilities and ELL's. We are running 20 long-term residencies with our school and homeless shelter partners, adapted our multi-media musical, FIVE, to a digital format and are offering it free to schools in District 75, and are developing a series of trauma informed training webinars for educators to help handle the lasting effects of this collective trauma on students.

Artistically, our Teaching Artists are contributing 20 minute arts-based educational videos to NYCCT's Creative Clubhouse. These videos will be available throughout the summer when reading rates in students historically drop. NYCCT has also made our past productions available to Title 1 Schools for free to allow students to attend a Virtual Field Trip. In addition to the show, students are provided with enriching activities, theater games, and more. We're leading an online class designed to explore emotions and themes kids are dealing with now, allowing them to have a safe place to play and have their fears and worries be heard and acknowledged.

Lastly, we are offering all of our paid programming for free to families of essential workers and anyone profoundly impacted by COVID-19. It is NYCCT's intention to make sure we are supporting the most vulnerable populations.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to



restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Without funding from these incredible agencies, we will not be able to deliver our arts programming to schools and homeless shelters at this time when the arts is imperative for healthy child development. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Nicole Hogsett

**Testimony of  
Paola Martínez Boone, Senior Advocate at the Disability Justice Program  
On behalf of  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
Before  
The Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Education**

Good morning. My name is Paola Martínez Boone and I am a senior advocate and social worker at the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). While school closures were necessary to slow the spread of the COVID-19, an emergency remote learning plan was put in place. This plan adversely affects both students with disabilities, particularly low-income students classified with emotional disturbance (ED), who rely on behavioral supports, as well as their parents who had to become instant teachers.

NYLPI shares the following testimony, and also, as a member of ARISE, a coalition-based education advocacy organization, fully supports ARISE's testimony:

Special attention must be paid to students with disabilities classified with Emotional Disturbance who require behavioral supports.

Students with disabilities classified with emotional disturbance are likely to spend a lot of time receiving behavioral supports from staff. Therefore, remote learning has presented a great challenge for, and disproportionately impacted, these students who already face many barriers to getting a quality education. Here are some of the problems that these students face that must be addressed immediately:

- a. The New York City Department of Education (DOE) fails to provide students with a consistent remote learning experience. Some students are receiving paper packets, while others are receiving instruction online only.
- b. Students who need behavioral supports are having a difficult time concentrating and following remote learning. The accommodations they need (e.g., re-direction) are often not provided during instruction time, leading to student disengagement and loss of instructional time.

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- c. Some of the related services are not being provided or DOE has given families a paper guide to provide the services themselves.
- d. Families have received no guidance regarding evaluations. This is especially problematic for students who currently are placed in an inappropriate school with inappropriate programs and services and believe they will start in September with the same inappropriate programs and services.

We urge implementation of the following solutions to the above-enumerated problems:

- a. Create a remote learning system that is consistent. At the very least, all students must receive paper packets alongside their online instruction.
- b. Ensure that all students whose IEPs mandate related services are provided those services during remote learning.
- c. Improve/update technologies to allow families to have their students evaluated during remote learning.
- d. Promptly schedule evaluations to ensure timely and appropriate services in the Fall.
- e. Develop a system to fully support students with behavioral needs during remote learning and ensure that all students whose IEPs mandate behavioral supports are provided those supports during remote learning.
- f. Simplify the process for parents seeking students' records.

### Conclusion

Thank you for your efforts to improve remote learning for students with disabilities, especially those classified with emotional disturbance. I can be reached at (212) 244-4664 or [pmartinez-boone@NYLPI.org](mailto:pmartinez-boone@NYLPI.org), and I look forward to additional opportunities to work with you to improve remote learning for students with disabilities. Further, I want to offer a link to NYLPI's remote learning resources, which were created to streamline services for families:

<https://nylpi.org/resource/special-education-remote-learning-information-contacts-resources-links/>. Please feel free to share these resources with your constituents.

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest-[www.nylpi.org](http://www.nylpi.org)

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For over 40 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) has been a leading civil rights and legal services advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status. Through our community lawyering model, we bridge the gap between traditional civil legal services and civil rights, building strength and capacity for both individual solutions and long-term impact. Our work integrates the power of individual legal services, impact litigation, and comprehensive organizing and policy campaigns. Guided by the priorities of our communities, we strive to achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, create equal access to health care, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local nonprofits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color.

#### About NYLPI's Disability Justice Program

NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to advance civil rights and ensure independence of New Yorkers with disabilities. NYLPI disability advocates have represented thousands of individuals and won campaigns improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We have long fought for the rights of students with disabilities, especially those classified as emotional disturbance, to obtain an appropriate public education.

May 27, 2020

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## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 20, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is **Pashmeena Hilal, and I am a Board Member of Magic Box Productions, living on the Upper West Side of New York.**

Magic Box's mission is to prepare young people to navigate the world with curiosity, collaboration, and a critical lens. Since our founding in 2006, we have guided over 20000 students, teachers and parents in the exploration of photography, documentary, animation and audio. Media arts offer a perfect way to ready our students for an ever-changing global society, by teaching what are called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, or the 4 c's: , critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity.

Since the onslaught of Covid19, our students, artists and teachers have working remotely, using technology to spur new thinking and engagement, and to spark creativity and energy during a time when many feel afraid and isolated. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations like ours are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. For this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Many of our students live in neighborhoods that are struggling. In the words of one administrator, 'they are in the epicenter of the epicenter.' The city's most recent budget cuts directly affect these young people, and their future.

Let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Countless NYC youth have discovered a passion for media arts, and built important life skills that help them in the future through our work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

**Pashmeena Hilal**

## Remote Learning Considerations - Mental Health and Medical Wellness

Dear Council Member Mark Treyger,

Hope all is well with you. Thank you for allowing the opportunity to offer my written testimony and concerns about remote learning as it relates to mental health and medical wellness. Please accept my testimony and it is my hope that you receive it with all of my best intentions for the community at large. My name is Patricia Williams and I represent PS 327 – Dr. Rose B. English School 23K327 and my organization, The Leadership Program-The Lead CBO. We are located at 111 Bristol Street, in the Heart of Brownsville, Brooklyn, NY 11212. However, I am making this personal statement on the behalf of all of the NYC students within the 5 boroughs and standing in the gap for my school community at PS 327. During this challenging season in our world history, we have been faced with a global crisis that has shifted our entire existence. I want to just expound up the need to increase Mental Health and Medical Wellness Initiatives within the NYC DOE system. As a 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC Community School Director, it is my responsibility to secure resources for my school community. My school is located in one of the city' most challenging neighborhoods of numerous environmental factors that impact wellness such short term housing (STH); impoverished surroundings and gun violence.

I wanted to explain an incident that occurred within my school community that will provide insight about the rationale behind this appeal. On September 21, 2018, our school community witnessed a fatal shooting that claimed the life of a young person within the neighborhood community. When that event occurred, the school did not get the all the necessary resources because it happened in the Chester Park - DOP, located next to the school but not on school property nor was it a PS 327 Community member that was impacted. The ENTIRE school body was affected by this incident because we witnessed it that afternoon. We went into sheltered in mode for the remaining portion of the workday from approximately 3:30 pm until 5:30 pm. The following week, we received some on-site debriefing for teachers and staff. However, the community was traumatized. But, WE as a school community utilized each other as resources for students and parents. CBO partners created indoor recess for the students. But, **more support** was definitely needed because parents were afraid for weeks to let their children come to school, they did not want their children to be dismissed from the yard, or have outdoor recess.

**Now, in a larger content**, we are faced with a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of thousands. WE are dealing with trauma, fear, grief, anxiety, hopelessness, depression, etc from the ENTIRE school community. At the City Council Meeting on May 27, 2020, it was stated by DOE that there will be only 170 Newly Hired Social Workers.

**This is an insufficient number for additional social workers given the amount of emotional disturbances that individuals are facing and feeling in these times.** Currently, PS 327 has one full time guidance counselor, one part-time social worker, one STH social worker and other

clinical supports. However, post-pandemic, WE as a school community are going to be dealing with the sum total of all the parents, teachers and students' personal losses ranging from the uncertainty of the future to the certainty of unemployment and the reality of personal illnesses and/or loss of loved ones, unfortunately. Another issue within this community is asthma management. Approximately 15% of the student body (including some adults) suffer from intermittent to moderate asthma conditions. With this preexisting respiratory condition, these individuals are MORE susceptible to contracting COVID-19.

If this is happening in my school, I am certain that other schools are facing the **SAME** issues with staff shortages in Mental Health and Medical Wellness.

**TODAY**, The school has become the source of wellness and hub for information.

Therefore, this is my appeal, **WE NEED MORE Mental Health and Medical Supports** including but not limited to Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Counseling and Therapy Groups.

Please see the below in detail some supports that would benefit school communities:

1. Revisiting the DOE budget to include Full-Time Social Workers dedicated to ONE school.
2. Form partnerships with social work schools to get utilize resources i.e. Interns and residency placements
3. Review existing grants within schools to increase funding to hire more clinical and/or case management staff
4. Provide Mental Health First Aid Training/Certification
5. More Crisis Intervention Support
6. Onsite Grief Counseling
7. Additional Nursing/Medical Support from DOH

If you would like more information about my concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again, I thank you Council Member Treyger and the City Council of Education for allowing me to voice this concern.

Stay Safe and All the Best,



## Patricia Williams, MSOL

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Community School Director @ P.S. 327

The Leadership Program

535 8th Avenue, Floor 16

New York City, NY 10018

Phone: 212.625.8001

Fax: 212.625.8020

[tlpny.com](http://tlpny.com)

*"...building strong leaders in classrooms and communities."*



Greetings esteemed Councilmembers,

My name is Paullette Ha-Healy and I am a member of the Citywide Council for Special Education. I am a mother with a daughter in District 20 and a son with autism in District 75. I thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns as a parent and as a member of the special education community.

The students of D75 are regressing in an exponential rate in this remote learning environment. Teletherapy has been inconsistent and parents are forced to implement therapy they do not have training for. They do not have access to tools and/or equipment that would normally be available in the therapy session at school nor do they have the expertise needed to know whether the session is being executed properly. Our children are exhibiting behavior issues (tantrums, self harm, loss of speech, etc) not to mention the emotional toll the isolation itself has taken during the quarantine. Our students with developmental delays need hands on, face to face therapy which has been impossible to execute during the pandemic. Because of that shortfall, our students progress has been arrested and the backward slide will continue well into the new school year in September making the transition back to brick and mortar a more tumultuous task than for their general education counterparts. I am fortunate enough to have the most supportive school staff in my son's D75 middle school who does video conferencing on a daily basis and are available to meet online to help my son when he is struggling with a lesson. They have modules, videos and staff available to support both his mental health, his physical wellbeing and his continued instruction. It breaks my heart that families I have spoken with in my D75 community are not having the same experience. We are failing our children now in this remote learning environment and not changing our approach in dealing with the obstacles will result in our children being in a perpetual state of catch up and will no doubt be left further behind than they already are. Continuing to fail our children is not an option.

In this time of fear, stress and loss the notion that we need to compare traumas in order to quantify who is in most need of support is beyond disturbing. Yet I am here with my fellow educators, parents and advocates rallying to not to allow inequitable cuts that will result in the loss of mental health supports, increased inequity in our impoverished communities (90% of our 26,000 students enrolled in D75 come from these communities. 80% of the 200,000 plus students in special education citywide reside in these communities) and furloughing our teachers that have worked endlessly to continue education for our children. How can we prepare to deal with the deficiencies remote learning has left our students in with only a quarter of the budget our education systems had the year prior to the pandemic? The struggles of our children should not be overlooked in favor of bloated bureaucratic salaries and unnecessary consulting contracts. Our special education students make up one fifth of the 1.5 million total students enrolled in our school systems yet are almost always an afterthought when it comes to policy decisions that affect our city's children.

Lastly, I want to thank Councilmember Justin Brannan for recognizing the needs of his district and created a joint committee on Special Education to find solutions to the deficiencies our families have been forced to endure. I encourage the rest of the Education Committee to reach out to their constituents within their residing districts and allow parents raising children with special needs a seat at the table.

Thank you for this opportunity. Be well and stay safe.

Best Regards,  
Paullette Ha-Healy  
CCSE Recording Secretary

**Statement from Phil Wong  
President, Community Education Council 24**

Good afternoon Councilman Treyger and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this afternoon on remote learning. My name is Phil Wong, the President of Community Education Council 24. Our district represents 55 schools serving students in grades pre-K-12 located in Ridgewood, Maspeth, Glendale, Middle Village, Elmhurst, Corona, Woodside, and of sections of Long Island City and Sunnyside. Since mid-March, I have spoken with a lot of parents and students in my school district, and I hereby present my findings and recommendations:

Remote learning is not teaching – virtual classrooms can approximate classroom discussions, but it may never replace it. It is not and never will be the silver lining that could change the centuries old, lecture based approach to teaching. The reasons are as follows: **First**, there are too many distractions to name – pets, family members, phone calls, etc. Kids could NOT learn remotely from home if they don't have their own quiet, private space. **Second**, there's little or no discussion during or after the lesson, although there's a chat space as a discussion board but there's no effective way to stimulate a discussion. **Finally** there's an issue of completing each lesson. It is impossible to control student focus and behavior in a remote environment. No matter how well the lesson is designed, students have the choice to open a new app, a web browser, or put the phone down.

We have other issues that remote learning could never offer -- Kids can't play music at home, can't do gym in front of the screen, and can't interact with other students virtually. The most important missing item is that we have little to none teacher-student interactions, especially one-to-ones. Without adequate teacher-student interactions you can not accurately assess the students. Remote learning is effective only when you mandate time each day for student-student and teacher-student interactions.

Which brings to my next topic – grades. Around 70 percent of the school year had already been completed by the time schools were closed on mid-March. DOE's grading reform for this school year were pushed out without getting feedback from CECs, and it essentially throws out what students worked hard on 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the school year and replace it with a PASS/FAIL. This policy is telling kids with a 95 average that they have the same grade as another student with a 70 average. This is wrong -- striving for excellence is what this city, this school system is about, not "just be like everybody else." Kids can't be the next Mayor or the next Council person if they are taught "be like everybody else." In view of the difficulties encountered by students and teachers during this remote learning period, it make more sense to keep the letter grades of the first 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the school year, and drop the grades for the rest this year or drop the lowest grade of the school year. Keeping a letter grade for the school year is the best solution, you could still use it to apply for middle school or high school, and DOE will not have to waste time coming up with new screening standards for the upcoming school year.

Thank you.

The impact of COVID 19 on City's schools is unmeasurable in many aspects. For students who do not have a device and internet access remote learning remains a challenge. Emotionally there are students who can't cope with distant learning. They need the physical environment of a school building to progress. If remote learning will take place in September, this council should ensure that all kids have access to a device with internet access.

Pierre Labissiere

I am writing, as a NYC public elementary school parent and NYC public high school teacher of many years, to voice my support for the following:

- 1) Avoiding any and all budget cuts to classroom teachers, social workers, counselors, and anyone else involved in the direct, human work of caring for and educating our children during and after this crisis.
- 2) Shifting any money that is being added to support the NYPD in educational settings into classroom, social-emotional, and restorative justice practices, and de-funding the NYPD overall to replace them with service providers for mental health and community support.
- 3) Partnering with the State legislature to raise revenue for our children's education by taxing billionaires and millionaires.
- 4) Ending discriminatory screens for admission to all NYC middle and high school admissions for two years, with the commitment to explore ending them permanently going forward, with all stakeholders at the table and explicit efforts made to engage those stakeholders typically without a voice..

### **Budget**

As a public school parent and teacher, I oppose a budget that cuts hundreds of millions from classrooms and critical programs at a time when our young people need more help, not less.

Although the mayor has acknowledged that the upcoming school year is going to present extraordinary challenges for teachers and students, he has still proposed budget cuts from the classroom estimated at over \$140 million. That would mean teachers, classroom aides, guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, principals, assistant principals, and others could be dismissed or displaced.

At the same time, his proposed budget includes increases for School Safety Agents, who already outnumber the total number of counselors, social workers, and school psychologists - and this is in the context of de Blasio continually increasing the NYPD budget--from \$4.6 billion in 2014 to \$5.6 billion in 2019—even as crime has dropped to historic lows. The services the Mayor wants to cut now are services New Yorkers depend on to be healthy and safe, and are especially critical to Black, brown, and low-income New Yorkers —the very same communities the NYPD criminalizes, abuses, and disproportionately incarcerates. The budget as currently proposed could result in the police being more integrated into social services—which is harmful and ineffective.

None of this is acceptable, and is especially disturbing in the current crisis, so I am writing to demand a budget that makes NO cuts for the classroom and for those adults who provide direct instruction, support, and guidance to NYC public school children. In fact, the public schools and the children they serve will need an infusion of increased funding to make up for the disastrous effects of the pandemic on school communities.

### **Admissions Screens**

I am in agreement with The NYC High School Application Advisory Committee (HSAAC) Subcommittee on Rubrics for Screened Programs that it is imperative that these screens be removed during and following the crisis of Covid-19, which has exposed the inequities that have long plagued our public schools. These inequities have only worsened as students' home environments have become their learning environments in our economically stratified city.

To be clear, this crisis is a turning point, in the original sense of the word crisis, meaning "the turning point for better or worse in an acute disease" or "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending." At this critical point for education in NYC, we should not let the disease of systemic inequity remain

untreated, but should instead insist that we have a unique opportunity and an *obligation* to engage in a deep and probing inquiry into the ways our education system could be better at educating all our children. And, since the effects of specialized high schools, G&T programs, and screened admissions policies are questionable at best, and detrimental at worst, the NYC DOE should commit to such a process of inquiry that is transparent, democratic, and involves all impacted stakeholders in the NYC public schools.

For too long, our system has allowed some families to feel entitled to opportunities at the expense of other children, creating a separate and unequal school system. In the words of the student-led group Teens Take Charge:

*“New York City is one of the nation’s most segregated public school systems, partially because it has the largest degree of competitive admissions screening anywhere in the country. The high school admissions process is called ‘open choice,’ meaning any student is able to go to any school, regardless of where they live. But it’s a lie. Available choices are dictated by everything from your zip code to your grades to whether you are able to make it to an in-person interview.*

*“Going into next year’s high school admissions cycle, we cannot carry on with ‘business as usual.’ We have long known that grades, attendance, and test scores are inadequate measures of a student’s potential—rather, they are more reliable measures of a student’s access to resources and level of income.”*

Again, I hope the DOE will drop discriminatory screens for the next two school years, and will commit to conducting an inquiry that leaves on the table the permanent rejection of screened admissions, and a new era of progress toward real integration and education justice.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 18, 2020

As New York City recovers from the COVID-19 crisis over the coming months and years, the arts and culture community will play a crucial role in the recovery of schools and communities. In allocating cuts and resources, the City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.

The New York City Arts in Education Roundtable is a service organization whose core purpose is to elevate, enhance, and sustain the work of the arts education community in New York City's schools and beyond. We are a community of organizations and educators that shares resources, provides professional development, and advocates for the needs of our members and the communities they serve. Our work lies at the intersection of culture, education, and community and occurs in over 1,290 public schools, in every neighborhood, and in all five boroughs.

Arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on our students or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city.

As you go about your duties, please remember that #ARTSareEssential and that arts experiences #buildCOMMUNITIES. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Sobha Kavanakudiyil, Board Co-Chair  
Jennifer DiBella, Board Co-Chair  
Kimberly Olsen, Managing Director  
Rachel Watts, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
David King, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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

### Re: Remote Learning: The Impact of COVID-19 on the City's Schools

May 27, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about remote learning. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For nearly 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. We speak out for students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, students from immigrant families, students who are homeless, students in foster care, students with mental health needs, and court-involved youth.

We recognize the immense challenge of quickly transitioning a school system of 1.1 million students to remote learning and appreciate the diligent work of DOE staff and educators. Yet, like the pandemic itself, school closures have had a disproportionate impact on historically marginalized communities and have magnified existing inequities. While schools have been closed, AFC has helped hundreds of families who were facing barriers to meaningful participation in remote learning. We are concerned about students who had to wait over a month to receive an iPad or experienced other technology barriers; students with disabilities who are struggling without the supports they typically receive at school; students who are not engaged in remote learning due to mental health needs that are going unaddressed; students whose parents speak a language other than English and are having difficulty helping their children access and complete assignments in English; students living in shelters who lack a quiet spot to study; students in juvenile detention who have not had access to live teacher instruction or regular access to computers, related services, and coursework; and older youth who now spend their days caring for younger siblings or working to help support their families, leaving them little time to focus on schoolwork.

While we have made many recommendations to the DOE, I will focus my limited time on just a few. First, since summer school will be entirely remote, the DOE must

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redouble its outreach efforts and provide individualized support to families of students who are not regularly engaging in remote learning, including students with disabilities who are supposed to have Remote Learning Plans. The DOE should work with families to determine the barriers they are facing and implement solutions, whether that means helping with a technology fix, providing instruction and assignments in the family's home language, connecting older students to an SYEP stipend so they can earn money and course credit, offering positive behavioral strategies and interventions, connecting students with community mental health providers offering telehealth services, or offering a seat at a Regional Enrichment Center so that the student can receive in-person support from educators.

Second, the DOE should begin implementing creative solutions this summer to help address the gaps that have widened. For example, as students are no longer limited to the staff at their school, we urge the DOE to offer one-on-one or small group evidence-based literacy instruction to students using the Universal Literacy coaches and IEP teachers whom the DOE has already trained. In addition, the DOE's social workers, guidance counselors, crisis management paraprofessionals, behavioral specialists, school climate managers, and restorative practice coordinators – at the school, borough, and central office levels – should be working together to support students with behavioral and mental health needs and their families.

Finally, the DOE must plan to get students who have fallen behind back on track when school buildings reopen. As we said in our budget testimony, when school buildings reopen, every student must have a seat, including children who have a legal right to a preschool special education class; every student must have a way of getting to school, including students in foster care; every student must have access to the mental health support they need, including students with significant mental health needs who would benefit from the Mental Health Continuum; and every student must have needed instructional support, including increased capacity at existing DOE transfer schools to support English Language Learners ages 16 to 21 who have fallen behind, as well as the compensatory instruction and services to which students with disabilities are entitled under federal law to make up for the support they missed.

We are counting on the City Council to reject proposed cuts to school budgets and work with federal, state, and city officials to ensure our schools have the resources they need so that the current crisis does not have lifelong consequences for a generation of children.

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



## ELMYS SPECIAL SERVICES

### New York City Education Committee Testimony

I would like to thank Education Committee Chairman Mark Treyger and the rest of the members of the New York City Council for holding this hearing.

My name is Ray Knights, and I am the Chief Executive Director of Elmy's Special Services, Inc. Founded in 2002, Elmy's Special Services believes that every person, regardless of his or her race, ethnicity, or disability, deserves dignity and respect. It is our mission to ensure that every person is allowed to achieve his or her full potential through appropriate and individualized programming. We seek to educate, serve, and support individuals who are diagnosed with developmental or emotional disabilities.

I would like to acknowledge the many graduates from pre-school to high school that worked hard to graduate and will not have the opportunity to celebrate their achievement with a formal graduation with their friends and families. I want to congratulate them on their achievement.

I come from a family of educators. I have been part of the social services field for more than 25 years and among the most rewarding positions that I have held was that of Head Teacher at a treatment facility. I am proud to say that I am married to a school principal. From her dedication, I have seen firsthand just how hard educators have worked to teach our children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote learning has presented many possibilities and challenges for our educators and children.

First, Elmy's has noticed that remote learning is bringing out lots of creativity for our students and staff. Everyone is thinking outside the box to find new ways to engage and participate in lively instruction and discussion. Remote learning has provided our staff with an opportunity to experiment on new educational techniques.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, our knowledge and experience with remote learning was limited. Videoconferencing tools and other digital resources are providing our students an opportunity to experience tele-working which may become the new normal for many professions.

Elmy's has also noticed that our teachers and staff have used remote learning for their professional development. Many of our families have become more involved in their children's education. Our families make suggestions and support our teachers by reinforcing their lesson plans.

The Zoom platform has made more families feel connected to their children's schools because they can easily communicate with their child's teachers and observe classroom instruction. We hope that this will continue once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Remote learning has also posed many challenges for our students. Many students are not working to their full potential. Our teachers have reported a decline in some of our students' work products in different subject matters. The newness of remote learning has made it difficult to engage some students. Also, some students do not log-in until late in the afternoon or the evening and are missing out on LIVE instruction.

Unfortunately, many of our families are struggling to teach multiple children in their households and need a lot of support. Families also report that their children are missing the human touch that teachers provide.

Ideally, students need an opportunity to leave their homes to socially interact with other children and having to receive all of their education at home can be disruptive. Remote learning has exposed many of the economic inequities in our City.

Many families in our communities lack access to broadband internet service and devices that are capable of supporting videoconferencing tools. Further, many children are going without food because school is where they receive their meals.

As we start the process to reopen our economy here in New York, we hope that we will be able to safely resume classes at traditional schools as soon as possible but until then Elmy's is committed to using all of our diligence to provide our students with a quality education through remote learning. Thank you.

Rebecca Fitton

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Rebecca Fitton and I am the Education & Outreach Associate at Pentacle (based in the Financial District) and we work with a variety of schools and community centers across NYC.

The mission of our Education & Outreach programs is to facilitate a broad understanding of both performance and nonprofit career possibilities for youth. The In-School Program instructs youth in dance while inspiring them to explore a range of careers in the arts. Our Community Programs in under resourced NYC neighborhoods provide exposure to dance and to nurture professional development. The Career Development programs give college students and graduates work experience, mentorship, professional development seminars, and a peer network of colleagues. We work with over 300 students and young professionals each year.

Our programs have continued remotely through the pandemic with adjusted scopes to best respond to the communities in need. In a time when a future arts career seems inaccessible, we are continuing our necessary programs, supporting arts education at multiple educational levels. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through

our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Fitton

**Councilman Mark Treyger, Chair**  
**The New York City Council Committee on Education**

Rhoda Wong, Program Director  
Alliance for Families with Developmental Needs (AFDN)  
[afdnfamily@gmail.com](mailto:afdnfamily@gmail.com)  
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(917) 863-1591, (646) 982-4060

May 27, 2020

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

**Written Testimony:**

My name is Rhoda Wong. I testify on behalf of the Alliance for Families with Developmental Disabilities (AFDN). AFDN connects over 500 parents and caregivers having children with developmental disabilities and special needs. Most of the children are in the public-school systems with IEP and supposedly receiving special education services. And many of their parents are new immigrants and monolingual Chinese speaking. In addition, majority of our members are from low income families with limited education. Some families have more than one child with disabilities in the family.

Remote learning under Coronavirus crisis has great impact on schoolchildren with developmental and learning disabilities. Many of our parents have great concerns on “regression” of schoolchildren with special needs and impact of the interruption of special education services. While schoolchildren receiving general education has suffered from remote learning, the virtual classroom learning is impossible for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Since the public school closed in mid-March, our children have shown different levels of regression in terms of physical/sensory, emotional, behavioral, academic and daily functioning. Our concerns include:

1. Lack of face-to-face interactions and stimulations from familiar teachers, therapists, peers and classroom environment, particularly children with autism and are non-verbal – Some teachers only post assignments online. They have never called or contacted parents to update students’ conditions or offer support (including technical or psychosocial). Some parents expect at least one-hour individual contacts weekly. Some parents believe that special ed teachers should communicate with students 30 minutes daily personally. Special class only have 6 to 10 students.
2. Virtual therapies – parents actually do different types of hands-on therapies. Moreover, some school counselors received many additional requests for counseling services re: emotional and behavioral problems during COVID-19 from parents managing the school children with special needs at home. However, parents lack skills to complete therapy tasks and get extremely exhausted. Children are not benefitted.

3. Children do not pay much attention on the computer or i-pad screens because of short attention span. They exhibit behavioral problems due to poor instruction online. Students with special needs are easily melting-down because they may not be able to handle assignments given by teacher online (without verbal instructions). They could easily get frustrated when they are not able to achieve what they usually could complete on their own.
4. Many low-income families need material supports such as printer, ink and paper. It's good the DOE gives out i-pads for online classes and remote learning, but students with developmental and special needs cannot complete all assignments online due to poor attention. Parents need to print out the assignments and assist the students patiently working on papers.
5. Non-English-speaking parents have problems handling high-level technology used in learning. They are exhausted and overwhelmed with remote learning, virtual therapies as well as their child's emotions and difficult behaviors. They are not able to communicate with schoolteacher and school counselors for help.  
An AFDN parent (Father J.) reported that his son with ASD was not able to sit over 15 minutes in front of the computer screen. Both unemployed parents became students on their own, learning from the virtual class and engaging their ASD child the rest of the day to complete the school assignments. Due to poor English proficiency, they were not sure how much they absorbed from the virtual class. They asked a friend for help. So, it ended up three adults teach one child at home.

AFDN parents requested that:

1. State and City government should not cut the budget on education, particularly the special education services with IEP that 200,000 NYC school children with special needs are receiving. They are either in general education program with special education services or special education small classes (6 to 12 students) based on the different level of functioning.
2. Teachers and school professionals, particularly special education providers, should take a proactive role to contact and support non-English speaking parents during remote learning. These parents require a lot of supports on many aspects, especially on high technology.
3. When students return to school in September, DOE should re-evaluate all aspects of students' functioning and renew their IEP for appropriate services to address the concerns of regressions.
4. AFDN parents asked what are the considerations to prepare special education program students to return to school? For example, school personnel and professionals got tested prior to returning, daily protection measures, school environment and classroom set up.

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
May 27, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Richard Toda, and I work for American Ballet Theatre, whose administrative offices and rehearsal studios are located in Union Square.

The mission of American Ballet Theatre is to *create*, to *present*, to *preserve* and to *extend* the great repertoire of classical dancing, through exciting performances and educational programming of the highest quality, presented to the *widest possible audience*. Education and engagement programming annually reaches over 10,000 NYC students. During the current pandemic, ABT created new resources for New Yorkers and adapted to remote learning to maintain programming for NYC school communities.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them navigate the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Richard Toda  
Artistic Coordinator of Educational Outreach  
American Ballet Theatre



To Whom it may concern:

I am the parent of two children currently in the NYC Public school system. My daughter is a 10th grader at Millennium high school (Manhattan Campus), and my son a 6th grader at NEST+m. My children's remote learning experience has been stark.

As soon as this crisis hit us, as a parent, I felt that NEST+m had a transition plan for remote learning. After the first week, my 6th grader had a rhythm and a schedule, he was engaged, learning, communicating, and happy. Unfortunately, there was a clear disruption when the DOE abruptly stopped the zoom classroom, as a parent it took us time to correct and adapt. The team at NEST+m worked quickly to find another solution, but it was not as effective for my child as the zoom classroom.

Since the live classroom has resumed, my son has been excelling. The team at NEST's approach, of combining live and recorded classrooms plus office hours is brilliant. My son an honor student in Math and Science has always struggled with the other subjects. Now because of the option of live classroom plus the recordings, my son can go back to non-math/science subjects and can learn at his own pace. His grades have gone up and he is learning more about topics and subjects that previously he would have needed extra outside help with or given up on.

It has been heartbreaking and frustrating to see my daughter's experience. Giving children work does not equate to learning. The lack of engagement and virtual facetime especially at the high school age, where children tend to be highly social can cause long term effects not only in our children's learning but on their mental wellbeing. My daughter, who was always a happy go lucky child is constantly sad and needs more help than ever. As the daughter of educators and someone who truly believes in the public-school system, it saddens me that I am searching for alternatives for my daughter if this continues.

If schools are postponed this September, I would urge the DOE to design a program following NEST's approach. Its equitable and effective.

Nothing can ever replace the live classroom and school experience and I am hopeful schools will resume in September. I would recommend the consideration of recording the classes/instructions to give students the opportunity to go back and review. The combination of live instructions and recordings will make it equitable for kids as they all learn differently.

Thank you for your time.

Warm regards,

Sarah Elbatanouny

Dear Chair Treyger and City Council Education Committee,

Thank you so much for having the hearing earlier this week. While it was long, it certainly highlighted many concerns that have been on my mind during this pandemic.

While sitting for over 5 ½ hours listening to testimony, there was a group of students that weren't discussed. Matter of fact, they're never part of the discussion, unless I bring it up. The forgotten children. The kids that don't fit the general education model, or the D75 model. The kids whose parents have to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars in order for their kids to get a "free and appropriate education". The kids that have been placed at NYC Approved schools. Some residential and some day schools in NYC, throughout the state and even Massachusetts and New Jersey.

None of these families have seen a remote learning survey. They aren't aware that their kids are supposed to have a remote learning plan nor do they know that they can get access to a remote learning device. One mom I spoke with has kids at Churchill and the other in a NEST program. She's very engaged and wasn't aware of any of this. Where was special ed on this hearing? They of course really need their own hearing.

I'm scared. I'm scared for these kids. In previous hearings, you and the education committee for years have heard about my amazing son Benjamin. I'll save his story for another time. Ben turned 21 while being strictly quarantined up at his school in Massachusetts (DOE approved/funded thanks to my \$5,000/year attorney. Who I can almost afford because both of my parents died. I haven't seen Ben since the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in February. Unless I take him for the rest of the school year, then I may not see him until June 30<sup>th</sup> when he ages out. There are kids that have been at home since March 13<sup>th</sup>. (they went home for a weekend and got caught when Massachusetts put the "stay at home" order in place. They didn't bring laptops home. They have a weekends worth of clothes and talk about parents not being prepared. Nobody from DOE has contacted the school or parents for check ins. (You'd think they'd want to know if their kids are at school or home and if they're doing work.) You don't need a PhD to know how academics are going for kids that have anxiety, learning disabilities and oppositional issues etc. that are stuck in their dorm or apartments.

Having him in a school in Massachusetts we were under the assumption that he'd get a diploma without taking Regents. No one during ANY of his IEP's with the exception of the virtual IEP meeting held early April 2020 mentioned Regents and diploma versus "Certificate of Attendance". Ben said that he wanted a diploma. Here he is turning 21 and has to attempt 3-5 regents in June. BUT WAIT! Regents have been cancelled for June and August. DOE is asking me about his plans for transition. Isn't that their job? So now this kid that was abandoned by the system in 7<sup>th</sup> grade by "special ed reform" until I pitched a fit and hired an attorney still won't have a diploma. I'm just getting recommendations that he should apply for OPWDD. WHAAT???? Now? And yes, I've asked DOE many times about it and they said "let me get back to you".

Ben ages out in 4 weeks, I've been emailing since mid-April. Initially to Christine Foti and John Hammer directly, then CSE 9, Special Education info box, FACE as well as the Director of CSE. NOTHING. Not even a "Let me get back to you."

I've spent hours upon hours sitting on Special education task forces, High School Subcommittee, Executive Board of CPAC, Co president of Manhattan High School Presidents Council, PTA, SLT, DLT, (you get the point....I'm engaged in the system. I've been working part time so that I could spend hours upon hours at CCHS, CCSE, education hearings, CEC meetings, Presidents Councils etc. But, now that my younger son has graduated I have no voice at the table.

There isn't a seat at CPAC for Privately placed kids, (D75 has enough to worry about ) CCHS? No seat, CCSE? No seat. CEC? No seats. These kids are forgotten. The parents are forgotten. Do you know what the divorce rate is for families that have to deal with private placement? What about bankruptcy?

It's unconscionable. I think it's criminal. About 3 years ago I sat at a Special Education town hall with Corinne Anselmo and Carmen and a bunch of D 75 parents. I asked the question, when will the special education department create free and appropriate educations FOR ALL CHILDREN? Carmen deflected the question to Corrine who said she'd get back to me and have a private conversation. That never happened.

What will happen to these kids that are aging out this June from ANY program, that don't have their Regents? Which means no diploma? Especially with this unemployment crush how will these kids get jobs? What is in place for these kids? No one has the answer and time is ticking.

Thank you, Chair Treyfer for your concern and passion, especially with the marginalized communities. I hope that you can help us give these kids opportunities to be amazing adults. These forgotten children are part of the future. They need support as well as their parents.

My kid wants a job. He wants a diploma. Do you know what he wants to do? He wants to work with kids in the inner city and/or special needs so they feel loved and wanted, not forgotten like he was (yes those are his words). He's volunteered 3 weeks (His only time off from his 12 month school) each summer at a camp for people with disabilities at the Marist Brothers Compound (Mid Hudson Valley Camp) He'd stay there all summer if he could. "kids and adults with special needs deserve to know what camping is like. And their parents need a break." Yep, there are thousands of kids like Ben that have been forgotten. (those that meet him never forget him) He has a gift to this world. Will the lack of diploma suffocate his dreams?

Most sincerely,

Susan Ashland Crowson  
350 Bleecker St. Apt 2X  
New York, NY 10014

## **TESTIMONY**

The Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Education

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

May 27, 2020

The Legal Aid Society  
199 Water Street  
New York, New York 10038

Prepared by: Cara Chambers, Susan Horwitz and Melinda Andra

Good afternoon. We submit this testimony on behalf of The Legal Aid Society, and thank Chair Treyger and the Committee on Education for inviting our thoughts on oversight of remote learning and the impact of COVID-19 on the city's schools.

Throughout our 140-year-history, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Our mission is simple: we believe that no New Yorker should be denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. From offices in all five boroughs, the Society annually provides legal assistance to low-income families and individuals in some 300,000 legal matters involving civil, criminal and juvenile rights problems. Our Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear before the New York City Family Court in abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Last year, our Juvenile Rights staff represented more than 33,000 children. At the same time, our Criminal Practice handled nearly 220,000 cases for clients accused of criminal conduct last year. Many thousands of our clients with criminal cases in Criminal Court and Supreme Court are school-age teenagers and young adults. Annually, our Civil Practice works on more than 50,000 individual legal matters, including advocacy for families with school-age children.

Our Criminal, Civil and Juvenile practices engage in educational advocacy for our clients, in the areas of special education, school discipline, school placement and programming. In addition to representing these children each year in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients.

Our perspective comes from our daily contacts with children, adolescents, and their families, and also from our frequent interactions with the courts, social service providers, and city agencies including the Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Administration for Children's Services.

The Legal Aid Society supports the City Council's efforts to provide adequate funding and oversight for the Department of Education. We appreciate the City Council's attention to the needs of students in foster care and temporary housing, who are among the most vulnerable of New York City's children. Students in foster care have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has prevented them from connecting regularly with their parents and family members, as well as the school personnel and classmates on whom they rely for support.

Our comments today will address five COVID-19 related issues, including bridging the technical divide, the continuation of remote learning options after school resumes, special education services, superintendent suspensions, and increased access to the Regional Enrichment Centers ("REC") for students in foster care and temporary housing.

### **Bridging the Technical Divide**

We have long known that students who lack access to technology are at a disadvantage when it comes to research and learning. It became impossible to ignore the inequities created by the lack of technology when our schools moved to remote learning on March 23 of this year. Even as many internet providers came forward to offer families 60 days of internet access, it became apparent that that

was not enough to support families in need. Children who lacked devices or who were in temporary housing could not take advantage of the free accounts, and city shelters refused to offer students access to Wi-Fi. Even when a family had a computer or other device that could access remote learning, parents and educators saw that it was impossible for multiple children to participate in lessons and keep up with remote learning while sharing a single device. In response, the DOE stepped up and obtained internet enabled iPads to provide access to students in need. Whether that student is a high school student preparing for college admissions, or a preschool student whose parent can now access PBS programming and early learning games for their children, the technology is invaluable. However, the process took time and many students experienced a period during which they did not have access to the remote learning that was being offered by the Department of Education.

Moreover, COVID-19 has highlighted some of the ways that children lacking access have been disadvantaged in the past. We don't often think about how a 5 year old being able to access PBS or play ABC Mouse gives him an advantage in school over less privileged children, or how a 10 year old learning to type on a keyboard now will give him an advantage as he moves into high school or college, or how a high school student who is able to do independent research on the internet will develop a more nuanced understanding of historical events. Access to technology makes a difference in student learning. We are therefore asking that the Department of Education be supported in allowing youth to keep the remote learning devices that are currently on loan through summer school and beyond, and that they ensure on-going internet access by extending agreements with T-

mobile and other internet providers to all children who would otherwise lack access.

### **Special Education**

COVID-19 has created some special challenges for children with disabilities in respect to special education evaluations and services, both mandated by state education law and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is necessary that the Department of Education develop systems and be provided with funding to ensure that these areas are appropriately addressed once students are able to return to school.

The Department of Education has been unable to complete new psycho-educational evaluations during the remote instruction period because these testing instruments are not normed for remote administration. This has created delays in determining both whether a student is eligible for special education services and what programs and services the student may require. Many students' cases are, or will be, out of compliance with the 60-day statutory timeline for completing evaluations. Families need the DOE to create a system now, so that as soon as it becomes possible for psychologists to meet with students in person, they can hit the ground running and clear this backlog for evaluations to ensure that students are getting the services they require.

In addition, we have spoken with the parents of many children with disabilities who are not receiving the services that are required by their Individualized Education Programs, either because the Department of Education is not providing the service, or because the student is unable, due to his or her disability, to participate or benefit from instruction or related services being



provided remotely. At the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, the Department of Education gave itself “flexibility” in how it would provide services and developed “remote learning plans” for children with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Many parents were not consulted when the plans were developed, and of the plans we have seen so far, none include services that are consistent with the students’ IEPs. Notably the United States Department of Education’s recent advice to Congress on IDEA rights during the pandemic did not seek any emergency waivers of IDEA’s fundamental protections, meaning that students should continue to receive services mandated by their respective IEPs during COVID-19. However, that is not happening for most students with disabilities. It is therefore imperative that the Department of Education develop a system to provide make-up services to fully compensate those students for the services they have missed. In addition, all students with IEPs must be offered continuing specialized instruction and related services during the summer to avoid any additional regression of skills.

### **Continuation of Remote Learning**

Despite its challenges, we have seen that some of our clients are benefiting from remote learning, particularly youth who find it difficult to attend school in person due to mental or physical health issues. This brings us to our next point, which is that having developed a platform and methodologies to provide remote learning, the DOE should continue remote learning options after school resumes.

In the wake of COVID-19 we expect to see an increase in the number of children diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders, which already disproportionately affects the same vulnerable community most impacted by COVID-19: families of color living in poverty. The continuation of a

remote learning option would provide an option for those students who cannot attend school in person due to physical or mental health issues, who at this time are only entitled to, at the most, one to two hours per day of instruction.

In addition, continuation of remote learning could also give greater access to youth whose schools have limited course offerings, by allowing them to participate in courses that their home schools do not offer. The DOE should expand its current use of online programs and remote learning capabilities to offer a greater range of classes to all students.

### **Superintendent Suspensions**

When schools closed due to COVID-19, there were a number of students who had pending suspension hearings. The suspension hearing offices have encouraged many of those students to plead no contest. Those students who wished to take advantage of their due process rights have been told that their matters are adjourned until such time as school resumes. This leaves children in a state of limbo, in which they have the anxiety of an upcoming hearing and they do not know whether they will be allowed to return to their schools when school resumes. The uncertainty of their situation creates an additional stressor for students and families who are already experiencing anxiety regarding everything from illness of loved ones, to food insecurity during COVID-19. This complicates these students' eventual transition back to regular school attendance.

As a measure to help minimize additional trauma and to provide additional stability we request that the Department of Education provide amnesty for all students who had pending suspension hearings and immediate reinstatement for all students who were serving suspensions as of the closure of school on March

16. All these students have already experienced time away from their schools and peers which will extend at least through the summer. Allowing all students to return to school with their peers and with a fresh start when schools reopen will help create a sense of belonging and community which will help lessen the impact of the current health crisis.

### **Regional Enrichment Centers**

The Department of Education has created Regional Enrichment Centers (REC) to serve the children of essential workers. These centers have reportedly been underutilized. We would like to recommend that these centers be made available to students in temporary housing as well as students with ACS involvement.

Many city shelters are loud and overcrowded, with entire families sharing one room. The lack of space and quiet can make it very difficult for students attempting to participate in remote learning. Although the DOE has opened up its RECs to students of shelter staff, it refused to accept the children who live in shelters. Access to the RECs would provide a safe, quiet and structured place for students in temporary housing to participate fully in remote learning.

Also, Legal Aid's Family Court attorneys are beginning to see an increased number of foster care placements, as well as disruptions of foster care placements due to COVID-19. The stress of providing 24/7 care for children while assisting with remote learning, dealing with food and housing insecurity, and managing health challenges, has proved too difficult for many parents and foster parents to manage. In one recent case, a psychiatrically fragile parent decompensated when faced with the additional stressors of COVID-19 and managing her children's

remote learning. The children, who might have been able to remain at home if the parent had had a respite during the school day, had to be placed in foster care. In another case, a kinship foster parent's mother became ill with COVID-19. The demands of caring for a sick parent made it impossible for the kinship foster parent to care for the foster child and assist him with remote learning during the school day. The child had to be moved to a non-kinship foster home.

These involve a relatively small number of students, but the negative impact of such removals and placement disruptions on our clients is huge. We therefore ask that the DOE open the RECs to children in temporary housing and to children with ACS involvement.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and welcome any questions that City Council may have.

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May 26. 2020

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

Dear Council Member Salamanca and the entire New York City Council,

My sincere condolences to you and your family during this most challenging time in our borough, our country and our world.

I was asked to write about our experience with remote learning in the wake of COVID-19 and for the school newsletter and I thought I'd share it to advocate for

The transition to remote learning has not been an easy one. However, because we are all working together (school and family), it has been as smooth as possible for our family.

With our third grader, having a daily schedule, along with a check in call and email from her teacher each day helps tremendously. She knows what to expect and is able to navigate through the day accordingly. This allows her to show both responsibility and independence. She also has the opportunity to advocate for herself by contacting her teacher directly and asking questions, as needed. I am there every step of the way for when she needs but, for the most part, she's on the ball. I am grateful to her teachers for being available, receptive to feedback and answering questions. We are also having a positive experience with our 5<sup>th</sup> grader. The partnership between schools and families is needed now, more than ever and I am grateful that it exists at our children's schools, and hopefully all schools, especially at this time.

We were all thrown into this situation without warning and are navigating as best we can. The experience for each family will not be the same. However, if we ask questions, provide feedback, remain persistent and remember that we are in this together, I have no doubt that the experience will only get better.

Hang in there, you've got this!

Please keep our schools in mind when finalizing any budgets that will impact our children, educators, families and schools.

Takisha Dozier

[Takisha@me.com](mailto:Takisha@me.com)

646.418.0813

Parent and Constituent

South Bronx Classical Charter School

KIPP Freedom Middle School



Dear City Council Members,

Thank you for your continued support of arts education in New York City. I am writing regarding Waterwell Theater Program, to request your action to support non-profits in the arts and culture sector contracting with the NYC Department of Education.

Waterwell provides arts in education programs to public schools annually. Much of the expenses associated with the programs they provide to NYC public schools are covered by contract revenue from the NYC Department of Education. If outstanding invoices are not honored, this organization and many others like them will experience financial hardship and a disruption in programming.

My daughter has a learning disability and benefits immensely from this program at her school. It has helped her to learn countless skills and to gain self-confidence academically.

The 1.1 million students of the New York City Department of Education need the arts now more than ever, to keep them engaged and stimulated through this time of remote learning, and to keep up their sequential arts learning as mandated by the State of New York. The arts and culture sector fills the gap in providing arts education, but the lack of guidance from the NYC DOE makes it impossible to continue to support these students.

New York City's cultural community is ready to continue working in partnership with public schools across the city, but considerable confusion among individual schools and districts is hindering many from implementing remote learning and from receiving payment for duly contracted services, even those already completed prior to March 13.

On March 30, the NYC Department of Education issued a statement to arts partners that purchase orders would be paid for services completed, including services rendered online, yet our members are finding a very different experience. In the current situation, it is difficult to reach principals and administrators to gather required documentation for payment; some are being told their entire purchase order has been nullified; and the message many are receiving is that arts instruction is simply not essential at this juncture.

These cultural organizations provide services in advance of payment by the Department of Education, and nullifying contracts not only violates standing agreements, it robs students of what they need, and threatens the stability of organizations this city depends on to make a complete arts education available to all students. Meanwhile, the burden has been placed on classroom teachers struggling to provide remote learning content and keep students engaged - while our organizations and teaching artists are offering to provide high-quality online instruction.

On April 6, a letter was sent to Chancellor Carranza by the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable, a service organization for the NYC arts in education community. Our community has yet to receive a reply, and time is of the essence. We need your help to focus his attention on this critical matter, lest our long-standing and fruitful partnership with the city's schools be undermined now and beyond this crisis.

We are requesting your support on the following needs:

- A response from Chancellor Caranza with a commitment to provide clear, written guidance to district and school leaders and to arts partners during the COVID-19 shutdown.
- Assurance that completed work will be paid for, just as other support sectors have been assured by the Mayor's Office of Contract Services.
- The opportunity for cultural organizations and teaching artists to continue their work through remote learning through the end of the school year.
- A continuing commitment to the value that arts education is an essential part of every child's education and development.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter. I look forward to your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Tamara Daley



Dear Chairman Treyger and education committee,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am a fourth grade parent, Co-president of our parent association at Brooklyn Arbor PS K414 and a member of our school leadership team.

I want to add my voice in support of the many eloquent testimonies on how this pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the inequities in our education system. Concurrently we see a surge of 'parent involvement', not because parents are enjoying the much noted Corona Vacation, but because there is a great thirst for a full and equitable education for students from all corners of the city. Parents are desperate. The DOE has invested in a remote learning model which requires the fulfillment of a series of assignments to meet the notion of standards and assessments. The choice is the easy path – it's easy to measure and ostensibly facile to implement. However it entirely misses the crux of learning. This is how we have wound up with a system with so much discussion of devices and connections and nearly no discussion of the human connections (with teachers, classmates and staff), differentiated and culturally appropriate curriculum, with no emotion supports or learning; all touchstones on which true education is predicated. But this choice is not a surprising, as in our push for common core and measurable standards, we have lost sight of what should be our primary goal teaching our children to be learners instead of followers. We all know that if don't tend children's curiosity and engage it with imagination and criticality our democracy will wither and this is even more crucial in this pandemic. I would add that the right to imparting the tools to lead an intellectually robust life is central to the creation of equity.

My son wakes up every morning with a progressively resounding 'NO' and a 'why are we doing this?'. He wakes up, opens our laptop to a google meeting where the teacher reviews the assignments of the day. This is the bulk of live teaching. Since my son is shy he never has questions or a desire to communicate in 'the chat'. There is little time for his teacher to coax him out of his shell (as she would at school) since she is overwhelmed with students who can't connect or download or some other critical foundational issue. He is what is called an advanced learner, so he does not need to watch the videos or receive extra math tutoring to complete the prepackaged assignments that conform to common core standards. You might think remote learning is a breeze in our house. However I have become the enforcer, made to keep him on task because he has dedicated every moment of remote learning to creative ways to stray from tasks he thinks are boring, generated by a system that from his perspective does not care about his input and opinion. No one asked me if I wanted this job, if I had the time for it or was equipped to do it. But it is assumed I will do this easily because children should be self-regulating and understand that this is their 'job'. This is in no way a criticism of his teacher, who is one of the most caring and thoughtful educators we have been lucky to work with, as she too is bound by common core standards and needs to "demonstrate" progress. In the 10 weeks since we started remote learning, we have completed multiple assignments but I would be hard pressed to find the learning. While I know that we are in a position of great privilege, although our apartment is tiny we still have food on the table and my son has access and computer literate parents to support him. However even with this privilege we have been met with an education that rings hollow with no emotional supports or considerations for students who clearly know the gravity of what is going on in the world around them. This pandemic is an opportunity to reevaluate our system and steer it in the direction that all NYC children need and deserve. Instead of focusing on token standards we can teach collaboration and creativity (two of the top skills in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century job market). Instead of filling in worksheets we can teach our students the basis of mutual care and mutual aid (two of the top skills keeping this city together in this current crisis). We could easily use this pandemic as a teachable moment in every subject, potentially easing student concerns and frustrations by facing their terror head on.

I would urge the DOE and the council to focus on reopening schools next year with the goal of repealing the segregation endemic to the system by refocusing on each and every student as a capable individuals and as a human full of potential. Within our limited budget constraints this could include dropping all high stakes screens, removing all metal detectors and in school policing which are all very costly failed solutions. I urge the city to start reimagining curriculum and a system in which different types of learners collaborate and benefit from each other instead of segregating them into a hierarchical divisions which predicate many of the ills of our society. And finally I call on the DOE to create more direct avenues for parent engagement and methods to encourage the most marginalized parents to express their needs and opinions in a way which feels supported to them. If he DOE can transform a system that services over a million students in a scant few weeks we know they could do this with the political will.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tamara Gayer

May 28, 2020

Dear NYC council,

I am writing to express my concern with the recent education cuts that affect programs such as College Access for All. This program has made a lasting impact on the lives of thousands of students and educators. College Access for All is one of the most organized, impactful DOE initiatives that has been implemented since the early 2000s. As a graduate of a NYC public high school where college counseling was in the hands of one staff member, it has been amazing to see College Access for All build capacity in schools to help teachers and counselors feel empowered to support students in their postsecondary planning process. I sincerely hope that College Access for All doesn't have to be halted so abruptly for the next academic school year. Now more than ever we will need this program to help students and educators navigate the postsecondary planning process in the aftermath of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Tara Williams

DOE school counselor/parent/NYC public school alumna



## HUMMINGBIRD PROJECT

In this time of confinement and social distance, the program allowed the scholars to showcase their Ingeniousness, their resourcefulness, and to give them the ability to know how to read and truly understand what is required of them.

In the classroom they had the materials selected by the teacher. At home to be able to carry out their project, they have to investigate, to be curious, to improvise, find solutions, dare to do, all this makes them hummingbirds which like the bird of the Amerindian legend “I have to do something, I do my best “It is interesting to see how many of them were ready to take up the challenges that the current situation imposes on them

They learnt to be open and creative with what they were given to find  
They learnt to share art work with Mom, Dad, older sister or brother.

What the Hummingbird Project was also bringing to scholars is environmental questions to think about. After reading few lines about the Earth Day the question was

*Wednesday April 22, 2020 is Earth Day in 3 sentences.*

*Tell us why it is important to celebrate this day? From T. 7 years old.*

*“It is important to celebrate this day because we live on Earth. Earth keeps everyone together.*

*The Earth is special. Earth Day teaches us more about what is going on in nature and what we can do to help.”*

The Hummingbird Project gives students much more than the opportunity to be creative by using recycled materials, open to the world and to other people, but above all gives them the opportunity to Demonstrate independence,

Let's review some of their lessons and the way they had done their works

Let's follow A. on the different stages that her mother photographed to create her dolls, one with a roll of toilet paper and another with a plastic bottle.



To create a doll with a plastic bottle A. 6 years old worked with Mom



(2) S. 5 years old had to make a collage to decorate a flower and its leaves. Having no paper of different colors, she opted for painting and tissue paper to decorate the petals and leaves of her flower and play on a collage print

For the project “Protect your city with your name” M. did not have colored pencils and worked on a series of graffiti drawings in black and white while D. 7 years old played her on the



The challenges were taken up by several of the students, the answers to environmental questions too, they did “the right things for the planet”, learning how to collect recycling materials at home.

I will end with A.5 years old student who learns to speak English and finds fulfillment in realizing her projects. She is the first to email her work, to worry about the next project



Plastic bottle doll



**Testimony to the Committee on Education**  
**Daisy Rodriguez, Director, Government & Community Affairs**  
**Christopher Durosinmi, Assistant Director, Government & Community Affairs**  
**Wildlife Conservation Society**  
**May 27, 2020**

Thank you Chairman Treyger and the members of the Education Committee. Our names are Daisy Rodriguez & Christopher Durosinmi, Director and Assistant Director of Government and Community Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society.

We recognize that the City of New York is experiencing a tumultuous time, and we greatly appreciate your leadership as we navigate through these unprecedented and difficult waters. As you know, WCS has the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks that include the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo. With a combined collection of over 20,000 animals, our parks connect with more than 4 million visitors, including over 400,000 school children – many who attend Title 1 schools. We provide thousands of teachers and school administrators with the training and support needed to develop STEM learning opportunities for all of their students. In addition to the education and enrichment that our facilities provide, we also serve as a viable economic engine for the City. WCS employs over 3,500 employees across 50 countries, including more than 1,000 full-time staff working in New York City. As one of the largest employers of youth in the Bronx and one of the largest youth development programs in the City, WCS employs and supports over 1,400 youth ages 14-24 in a myriad of opportunities that create life sustaining change in our surrounding communities.

Like many in the cultural community, WCS has roots in diverse neighborhoods throughout the City, and our parks connect local youth and families to wildlife, science education opportunities, and conservation advocacy opportunities through accessible and inspiring programming, world class exhibits, and safe natural spaces. Prior to this pandemic, WCS has provided essential services through programming and partnerships that has positively impacted youth and families in underserved communities throughout the city. Through our Community Access Program (CAP), we provide thousands of seniors, youth, individuals with special needs, and community based organizations with complimentary access to our parks. Additionally, WCS has held long partnerships with City agencies such as the Department of Homeless Services and the Administration for Children's Services to provide educational opportunities and experiences to thousands of children and families.

But, WCS is more than an attraction. We are committed to our local community and providing equitable and accessible pathways to science and conservation. We are committed to disrupting

the viewpoint of who can engage in a particular science or conservation. We provide diverse audiences with opportunities to connect with nature, build their scientific literacy, and engage in conservation action (through a social justice lens). Through our WCS STEM Career Pipeline Program, youth ages 14-24 from historically disenfranchised communities receive the training, ongoing support, and network access that allows the youth to turn their first job or internship into a future career. Through workshops, skill-building, leadership training, and professional opportunities, thousands of local youth have benefited from the collective efforts of WCS professionals. This program is guided by our Youth Employee Advisory Council where the youth voice is elevated in meaningful ways throughout our organization. Inputs into our structure, opportunities, and workplace culture are elevated by this group. This youth development program is becoming a model for other cultural institutions and one we are committed to seeing through during this difficult time.

Despite closing the parks, WCS remains committed to providing access virtually to our parks and interactive programming for our communities. We know that the youth in our programs are in desperate need of support and enrichment during this challenging time. As learned we wouldn't be able to see the young people in our volunteer and internship programs in person, we pivoted to virtual engagement sessions. These sessions included large zoom meetings, guest speaker opportunities, office hours for one-on-one support sessions, and project based opportunities. Since the summer is still unclear, we have now pivoted to a completely online program for over 600 youth. This includes project based learning and opportunities for youth to use their voice to continue with our mission and their in-depth STEM learning. From conducting ecology research to creating information videos on science concepts to youth hosted guest speakers and skill building workshops, we are dedicated to ensuring that our youth feel more supported than ever during this moment in our history. This program was developed with the input of our youth and even their parents. Because many of the students have had very little science learning opportunities and have not left their homes in months, this serves as a much needed lifeline for our youth and will work tirelessly to support them now more than ever.

In addition to the support of youth, we have launched a number of digital engagement opportunities for families, children, schools, and teachers. Through our virtual Zoo and Aquarium, visitors can view webcams of exhibits, follow ongoing animal stories created by our keepers, and engage in family fun activities that incorporate art, science, and nature. We also have a virtual classroom that incorporates activities that engage audiences of all ages. The programs are designed to help parents engage their children in science at home. All of these elements are free and available on our website and social media channels. Additionally, we have launched Wildlife School Online (virtual field trips for schools) and have migrated all of the teacher education programs to digital learning platforms. We anticipate all of these programs to continue into the school year next year as we anticipate schools will need vital enrichment opportunities and resources that are science and nature-based. In anticipation of the summer,, we have moved all of our in-person summer camps to a virtual learning program called Wildlife Camp Online. While we have lost funding from the NYC DOE to offer free scholarships for this program, we are hopeful that this virtual learning opportunity will still be utilized by a number of New Yorkers.



We currently continue to work with a variety of partners to keep our countless communities as engaged and connected as possible. We share our offerings and more with our extensive list of community partners on a weekly basis. We have continued to partner with City agencies like the Department of Transportation who in commemoration of Earth Day, highlighted our work through our “Seeing is Believing” staff videos, an episode of our hit show, The Zoo, and an interactive Earth Day challenge. We are also partnering with dozens of organizations for World Oceans Day. Finally, we are actively looking for ways to ensure that New York has to spirit and vitality that we expect it to have. By keeping this alive, we can ensure an exciting future as New York begins to reopen.

Therefore, as the Council determines its budget priorities for FY 2021, we ask that virtual learning be considered as part of your budgetary decisions. As youth are facing the uncertainty of what “schooling” will look like in the future and the social inequities that many of them are being exposed to, the programs being offered by the cultural community, including our organization, remain pivotal and relevant to nurturing and fostering leaders for generations to come. By ensuring funding for online programming you will equip us to continue our robust offerings, survive this pandemic, maintain our trusted and invaluable role as important contributors to the City’s economy, and most importantly develop the next generation of conservation stewards in a new and exciting way. We thank you for this opportunity to testify today, and for your leadership on behalf of the City of New York during this crisis.

Good afternoon, my name is Yiatin Chu, CEC1 Member, SLT member and co-President of PLACE NYC. Today, I'm speaking for myself.

I want to talk about my school - PS184 on the lower east side. It is the only dual-language Mandarin school in the city. We are a Title 1 school, with a 70% Asian student body and mostly from new immigrant, non-English speaking homes.

I am thankful to that our teachers started live instruction in the first week of remote learning; with the exception of the Zoom ban hiccup, my child has been receiving daily live instruction. Her Chinese teacher can enunciate new vocabulary words and hear each student try to do the same. Our teachers have worked tirelessly to make remote learning as productive as possible, and I am grateful.

As an education activist, I have been busy speaking out on the UNFAIR K-8 grading policy that the DOE decided without first engaging with parents or PLACE. Even with many challenges that they face before, during and after the pandemic, families in my school count on their child's report cards as feedback on how their child is doing; there is a sense of accomplishment and pride when they see their child progress and excel despite their circumstances.

In the midst of the pandemic, the DOE wants to implement a top down citywide change to screened school admissions. My school, the only non-GT recognition school in D1, sends 2/3 of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders to academic screened high schools. Our students have prepared for and set their targets on the selective high performing high schools to further their academic growth and a path for socio-economic mobility. It is

unconscionable for the mayor, chancellor and the anti-education activists to seize this crisis to eliminate this education opportunity for the families at my school.

Lastly, I've been helping a student in my school that requested a device on March 16 and still had not received it as of last week (yes, 2+ months). She is not Black or Brown. She is an Asian 5<sup>th</sup> grader who has been managing Remote Learning off her mom's cell phone. In September, she will start middle school at Nest+M, a citywide academic-screened school.



**Testimony of Amanda Blair of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

Thank you for hosting this hearing.

My name is Amanda Blair and I am a College Access Counselor with Good Shepherd Services at Brooklyn Frontier High School. I have been working for Good Shepherd for the past 7 years.

Brooklyn Frontiers High School, a partnership between DOE and GSS, serves first-time ninth graders who have been held back at least twice in elementary and/ or middle school. We also serve students who have attended high school for at least one year and are looking for a fresh start and a new opportunity to complete their high school diploma. We know that all students, regardless of their past experiences in school, can be successful. Our school is designed to help students get back on track and to graduate ready for college and careers.

Good Shepherd operates four partnerships with the Department of Education across the City - Brooklyn Frontiers High School, South Brooklyn Community High School, West Brooklyn High School and Research and Service High School. Combined, GSS serves a total of 1,000 students throughout Brooklyn. As a result of COVID-19, all our supports went remote in March.

It became immediately clear that our students needed access to equipment and broadband at home. Our GSS team quickly assessed what students needed and across our community-based programs, we provided over 500 laptops to students in need.

While our teachers worked to create a new way of doing high school instruction within the first 24 hours, our GSS team focused on teaching students and their families how to connect to their classwork. Our staff have been critical in linking students to the classroom - and maintaining that human relationship that is fundamental to our school.

Beyond the immediate technical support, our team, as always, is focused on emotionally supporting our students. We help youth to restore faith in themselves that they are capable of being successful students. Just last month one of my students suddenly lost her Grandma who has raised her since birth. While dealing with such a devastating loss, this student, with our supports, has remained engaged with her work and is scheduled to graduate in June. This was a result of regular calls, text messages, and zoom meetings.

50% of students at Brooklyn Frontiers have special education needs and have IEPs. These students went from having one on one support to being at home, alone and without the support of their counselors and teachers.

Our school was created to re-engage students who had been disillusioned with school in the past. Relationships and a close, tight knit community are the bedrock of our school. Now our students are isolated, at home, with other siblings, the stress of having lost a job or experiencing parent loss of a job. Many have lost loved ones and have managed to push through and log on to classes where the support looks totally different than what helped them succeed at BFHS

What we are doing right now is being the glue that holds our schools together. That one on one attention - keeping the dialogue going - even when someone hasn't been able to log on, or is afraid, or just needs time to talk our team is here. Our students are facing a summer without any of the normal fabric of our city. No SYEP funds, Beacon and remote summer school for makeup work. We know that our connection to our students means they will be more successful in school, that their families will be able to get support and information that they need. This Summer is going to be unlike any we've ever seen but we are committed to support youth and the community.



**Testimony of Clara Delgado of Good Shepherd Services  
At the New York City Council Education Hearing on Remote Learning  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**May 27, 2020**

Good Afternoon. I would like to start by thanking Council Member Mark Treyger and other members of the City Council's Education Committee for hosting this hearing. My name is Clara Delgado and I am the Program Director for Good Shepherd Services at Franklin K Lane Young Adult Borough Center in Cypress Hill, Brooklyn. I have been with Good Shepherd Services for 15 years - first as a supervisor at an afterschool in Red Hook and then as an internship coordinator at Lincoln YABC before becoming a YABC program director 4 years ago.

YABCs are High School programs for young people from 17 to 21-year-old that support youth to complete their graduation requirements while in their 5th, 6th, and even 7th or 8th year of HS. Good Shepherd Services runs 10 such programs in Brooklyn and the Bronx and serve over 2500 students each year. I wanted to tell you the story of two of my current students.

I have a 19-year-old student who lives with an older sister and her boyfriend ever since their mother moved out of state last year. The sister and the boyfriend are under 25 years old and the three equally contribute to maintaining their household. This student had good attendance pre-remote learning though they struggled with the work. As soon as we transitioned to remote learning, it was difficult to get in contact with the them because the student wasn't doing their remote work on a consistent basis and would submit work outside of school hours. Once I was able to reach the student, I learned that they were juggling schoolwork with working 12 -16-hour days at a local

store. Since this student is over 18, they are not subject to labor protections that protect underage HS students. This student has to choose between completing schoolwork and working to support and contribute to the family and has selected to work.

The second student is 20 years old. Before remote learning, this student made use of the Lyfe Center in our building for childcare while they attended classes. The only other childcare option for their toddler were family members who would occasionally babysit. Now that this student is home and the primary care facility is closed, the student is unable to get family to babysit. Because this student is home caring for the child, they have fallen behind in their remote learning assignments.

From the two examples I have shared, I urge the Council to consider that there are students in the DOE system that are pulled in multiple directions. They are battling varied assumptions being made about them. On the one hand, employers and childcare providers assume that these young people are home with free time on their hands, and the school assumes they have no other obligations outside of their schoolwork. Both are wrong; for students who are essential workers, parents, and breadwinners for their household more supports are needed to help them shift education to their top priority.

It is the reason the Learning to Work programs were created, to support youth that needed additional supports to graduate high school. In the last two years, YABC/LTW programs have been hit with devastating cuts and program closures. This has resulted in reduced staffing leaving us all stretched to meet the needs of all our students. When I started at YABC 12 years ago, students mostly came in for a few classes and a couple of regents away from graduation, but today's students are increasingly designated IEP and ELL. They have children, are the breadwinners of their families, they have serious social-emotional obstacles to graduation that we must support them with to ensure their success.

I have been in consistent contact with both students and continue to support them through the emotional toll the pandemic has placed in their lives and I know that more supports are needed for them and other students with nuance circumstances that the current remote learning structure doesn't account for.

Thanks once again to Council Member Treyger and the Committee for allowing me to share these young people's stories with you today.