



**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education  
on the Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

January 20, 2021

**Introduction**

Good Morning Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education here today. I am Dr. Linda Chen and I serve as the Chief Academic Officer of the NYC Department of Education (DOE). I am humbled to provide testimony on behalf of my colleagues, including those joining me this morning: First Deputy Chancellor Donald Conyers, Deputy Chancellor Adrienne Austin, and Chief Administrative Officer Lauren Siciliano. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the critically important issue of student learning and academic progress during this unprecedented time.

Before I begin, I would like to express our gratitude to Speaker Johnson, Chair Treyger, and the entire City Council for your continued work and advocacy on behalf of New York City schools in service of historically underserved students.

While the pandemic has changed much in our lives, one thing that has not changed is this Administration's commitment to our students, their families, and our staff. Our school communities have experienced true trauma over the past year, including an abrupt shift to remote learning, separation from familiar school support systems, losses of teachers and loved ones, and fear and anxiety about health and safety. And we recognize students will continue to be impacted adversely until we fully return to in-person learning. Clearly, all of this makes the process of teaching and learning far more challenging.

In spite of this upheaval, schools have been focused on improving teaching and learning, meeting students where they are, and providing continuity of instruction and support.

We are also clear-eyed about the reality once all students and staff are able to return to their school buildings: that we will need to engage in a robust academic recovery period. Our 2021 Student Achievement Plan looks ahead to what our students will need next year and is rooted in healing and in learning – because our students will need both. This work will continue alongside our ongoing work to close the digital divide and improve remote and blended learning.

The bottom line is that our educators and staff members are focused on delivering the highest-quality instruction possible, in a supportive learning environment, so that every student has what they need to thrive no matter where they are learning.

**Closing the Digital Divide**

Recognizing that virtually all of our students were going to be involved in some form of remote learning, one of the biggest hurdles we have worked to overcome has been ensuring that students have devices.

To date, we have delivered 450,000 iPads and have ordered an additional 50,000 to distribute as needed when devices break, become outdated, or need to be replaced. We will continue to work with our schools using a combination of central iPads, school devices, and hotspots to identify solutions to address individual needs over the remainder of the school year.

### **Improvements to Remote and Blended Learning**

We're proud of all the progress our schools have made since our overnight transformation last spring. We know that nothing can replace in-person learning for students, which is why we have gone to such great lengths to provide that option for as many students as possible, especially our most vulnerable and youngest children. Currently, we have approximately 190,000 students being served in person, with 860 PreK to –5th grade and District 75 schools serving some or all of their students five days per week.

We have continually adapted and improved our approaches to support student learning, and strengthened our teaching practices through instructional guidance, robust training, and high- quality resources to support educators. I will describe a few of these.

During remote instruction, students receive at least two hours of live synchronous instruction, plus asynchronous instruction that include a variety of assignments, like working in small groups, and one-on-one check ins with teachers. Teachers continue to be thoughtful and creative in ensuring full days of learning for all our students. Within this context, we have provided essential supports tailored to students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

In terms of educator support, we have worked with our union partners to create guidance for both remote and blended learning to identify how to structure the school day, design effective educational experiences in each model, and working collaboratively to share best practices. We have also offered hundreds of professional learning sessions in all content areas as well as in academic intervention services. Those include supports for teaching multilingual learners and students with disabilities in remote settings. We created a DOE Google Master Class last summer to provide teachers and administrators with an immersive experience to learn best practices for teaching remotely via Google Classroom. The Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning has offered hundreds of high-quality professional development sessions to **thousands of educators and administrators** covering blended and remote learning in the core subject areas of math, science, social studies, ELA, arts, libraries, and academic intervention services.

And through our Borough/Citywide Offices, and at the district-level through superintendents, teachers also receive direct professional learning specific to their school communities. Those teams hold office hours and live Q&A sessions to support school staff. Superintendents and Deputy Superintendents are also monitoring the remote instruction through continued visits to classrooms and offering feedback to principals and teachers to strengthen and improve remote instruction.

Our schools and borough-based staff are continuing to closely monitor the progress of our students throughout this period. Prior to the pandemic, we assessed citywide performance primarily through

mechanisms such as the NY State 3-8 math and ELA exams and Regents exams, which the State canceled last school year. The DOE does not currently utilize another form of common assessment because our schools know their communities best. That knowledge is the basis for determining local strategic assessments to inform teaching and gauge student progress and growth. Schools are constantly using engagement tools to measure student learning throughout individual lessons and various diagnostic tools to assess student progress at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Data gathered from these assessments inform how teachers design lessons and organize student learning within the classroom. This work is essential and will continue as we look towards addressing any gaps that have resulted from this difficult time.

We anticipate there will be disparate learning progress in both literacy and math, with different needs at different grade levels. As we continue to look ahead, we launched the Fall 2020 School Experience Survey this week to gather valuable feedback from our students, families, and teachers to inform the spring semester and next year. The survey will be open until Friday, February 5. Schools, field, and central staff will have access to survey results in real time throughout the survey administration, so they can begin to take action on that feedback as soon as possible.

### **2021 Student Achievement Plan**

Last month, the Mayor and Chancellor announced a vision for recovery across our system. The plan will continue to be built and informed by the final months of this school year, but our framework gives us a clear path forward:

First, we are focused on **accelerating instruction** to advance student learning and mastery of the standards. While there is a tendency to want to cover more content to make up for learning loss, what is most important to make up for lost opportunities and accelerating learning for every student is seeking *depth* of knowledge.

To ensure students are on track, it is important to capture a baseline of where students are given the impact of the pandemic. In order to bring students back on track and begin that process, we must focus on how we can rapidly assess where students are in a low stakes manner and develop plans to advance their learning and mastery of the standards.

Looking ahead to next year, we know that every school needs to have a common, comprehensive assessment plan in place that includes both **common screeners and formative assessments**. Those will provide information for students, teachers, and families while also empowering central, executive superintendents, and superintendents with citywide data trends that allow for comprehensive and targeted school, district, and citywide support.

From there, we will increase access to **high-quality, shared, inclusive and standards-based digital curriculum** at every school to serve as a foundation for strong instruction. We want to support our school leaders make informed curricular choices by understanding current gaps in their offerings and how to support their schools in a transition to a standards-aligned digital curriculum. This work began this fall as

Superintendents engaged all principals in curricular conversations about implementing a shared and inclusive curriculum that is culturally responsive and digitally accessible.

We will continue to deepen this work of supporting leaders at all levels with the knowledge they need to make informed curricular decisions and to ensure that all schools have a curriculum in place for each core content area that is high-quality, culturally relevant, and responsive to the students they serve.

At the heart of this work will be **professional learning** to ensure that teachers and school leaders are well-prepared for the post-pandemic challenges we face. We want our teachers to have the skills to make adjustments to address unfinished learning and provide students with robust opportunities to engage in rich, grade-level work. In a system as large as ours, we are cognizant of the fact that teachers come into teaching with varying skills. We will continue to expand on our immense efforts throughout the pandemic to support educators and administrators. A critical part of this plan is expanding the innovative and successful practices in individual schools across the city. To support this work, DOE will also be phasing in a **learning management system** that houses lessons, tools, and activities for teachers and students that can be shared across the city.

Families play an essential role in every student's education, and this has only been heightened during blended learning. It is our job to support them and this fall we were proud to launch **Parent University**, which we will continue to expand. Through their NYC Schools Account, families have access to free courses, resources, events, and activities. Parent University seeks to educate and empower all families from early childhood through adulthood and help them advocate for the educational success of their children. More than 93,000 people have already visited Parent University and we will continue to work on expanding the reach of these programs, in part by adding more courses in different languages on an ever-growing range of topics.

In many of our districts, families receive individualized support, such as one-on-one assistance on how to access Google Classroom and other online learning platforms, troubleshoot connection issues, and tend to student's social-emotional needs. FaceTime sessions throughout the day and evening are available to answer questions and address such concerns. Teachers have collaborated to volunteer up to two office hours per week to support parents by appointment in the areas of homework help, technology, content, and/or translation. Those office hours afford parents with the opportunity to receive guidance and assistance in their own language in navigating student needs and supporting student social and emotional comfort.

Also integral to this plan is a city-wide approach for **confronting the trauma** and mental health crises faced by our students. Our schools have been employing a variety of strategies to support the well-being of their students and staff members. Some schools utilize individual wellness surveys for students to complete or have daily check-ins with students around attendance and wellness. Other teachers integrate social-emotional learning into lessons or at the top of each class, through restorative circles.

All of this work is made possible by the foundation we've built over the last two years, in partnership with the Council, in social-emotional learning and mental health supports. Our educators were prepared to



immediately provide critical frontline healing and support to students because of the work we did prior to the pandemic.

Additionally, we've built a partnership with Health + Hospitals mental health clinics to provide clinical care to students. This work will be informed by the use of social-emotional screens that empower teachers, who are the staff members who know our students best, to identify at-risk students and refer them to supports early. Using that information, we can help direct supports where they are needed most. That includes the 27 community schools and 150 new social workers we will bring on for next school year as part of this work. These new efforts are the first wave of a four-year plan to increase social workers and community schools throughout the city, starting with the neighborhoods most impacted by COVID-19. We are amazed at the ways our communities have worked together, supported one another, and persisted despite tremendous obstacles. And we remain committed to building resilience through wellness and strong school communities.

### **Conclusion**

This pandemic has tested New Yorkers and our school system in so many ways. As a community of 1.1 million students and their families and 150,000 staff, we have transformed every aspect of what we do to rise to the challenges of this moment. This is a testament to the determination of our incredible staff, students, and families. The shift to remote learning and the efforts made to reopen schools in a healthy and safe manner have been astounding given the difficult, unforeseen circumstances of a crisis that, exacerbated opportunity gaps that have existed for decades. Our focus remains on equitably serving our students and striving to close those gaps, which our Equity and Excellence for All agenda has made great progress in addressing. We are taking the lessons we learn every day to adapt and improve the delivery of education to the students of New York City in the face of the enormous challenge posed by the pandemic.

On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you for your time, and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



**TESTIMONY OF THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
BY MARY VACCARO  
VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION**

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

**REGARDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENT LEARNING  
AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

**JANUARY 20, 2020**

My name is Mary Vaccaro and I serve as the vice president of education of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the executive director of the UFT Teacher Center. On behalf of the union's more than 200,000 members, I would like to thank Chairperson Mark Treyger and all the members of the New York City Council's Committee on Education for holding this important hearing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and academic achievement.

From the moment Mayor de Blasio announced the closing of schools on March 15, 2020, the UFT focused on ways to support educators, students and parents with remote learning. Many educators had to rely on their colleagues to guide them through a whole new world and they had only a matter of days to make the transition. But they did it. In my capacity as the director of our UFT Teacher Center program, I can wholeheartedly say that the program was instrumental in the herculean effort. So, before I begin, I would like to say thank you to all the members of the City Council for your continuous support of the UFT Teacher Center program. Without your support, our success would not have been possible.

## **Challenges with Remote Instruction**

When we shifted to remote instruction, our educators discovered that many students did not have all the technical skills necessary to fully engage in remote learning. Others did not have access to the physical technology needed to participate in remote learning, especially those students in shelters and those not living in their own homes. Students often had to share laptops, iPads and computers with siblings and other family members. Many parents were unable to help their children due to work responsibilities; others were unfamiliar with the technology. Remote instruction posed, and continues to pose, many challenges. It's not surprising that in many instances it's been a struggle to maintain academic standards.

We have always made ourselves available to work with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) during this time. Although the DOE prepared lengthy guidance documents with descriptions of different models and digital learning tools, we have serious concerns about how the DOE disseminated these documents to teachers in classrooms, where they are most needed. Most teachers I speak with, and I speak with many, have never seen these documents, so it is difficult to say if they have been helpful tools in our efforts to maintain academic excellence. In addition, the documents are not always specific to the curriculum in schools.

I would also like to urge members of the City Council to continue to press the DOE to finalize the hiring of virtual content specialists. Many of our educators feel there is a dearth of virtual content available to them. The DOE promised over the summer that it would hire these specialists for the start of the 2020-2021 school year to develop this content for remote instruction. But the hiring only started in December and still has not been completed.

## **UFT Steps in to Fill the Gaps**

The UFT knows teachers cannot continue to teach the way they did before the pandemic if our students are to succeed. So, throughout the spring and summer we ramped up our efforts

to provide educators with the skills necessary for remote learning. Once buildings reopened in the fall, we provided professional learning opportunities so teachers on remote assignments and those in schools could work together.

The UFT Teacher Center provided many professional learning institutes over the summer and fall and continues to do so. That was possible because of our extensive network of 115 school-based sites. In fact, over the course of the 2019-20 school year, the UFT Teacher Center provided more than 121,000 hours of professional learning, technical support, mentoring and instructional guidance to more than 234,000 participants in New York City, including classroom educators, principals, paraprofessionals and parents.

Our classes continue to fill up as fast as we open them. For example, courses All about G-Suite and English Language Acquisition each registered more than 1,000 participants in just two days. We are also collaborating with Apple so teachers can enhance the technology skills they need for teaching and learning.

In addition to providing support for educators, in December 2020 our UFT Teacher Center staff launched a three-part series of free Saturday Student Academies that served as engaging remote enrichment for students from preschool to high school. Five thousand families registered for activities, held on consecutive Saturday mornings, such as virtual field trips to see holiday celebrations around the world and opportunities to virtually explore career choices linked to students' interests and dreams. We plan to have additional sessions in the spring.

### **Measuring Academic Achievement**

Graduation figures released last week show that New York City is just above the state average, and numbers even increased from 2019. Our members are working hard to make sure these numbers do not decrease in the face of nearly a year of exceptional circumstances.

We can all acknowledge that this is not a normal year and can, therefore, debate the validity and reliability of standardized tests, the traditional method of determining academic achievement, to measure success this year. We have already begun to look at other measurements such as authentic assessments that might consider the current learning environment and the challenges faced by many of our students.

## **Conclusion**

I want to again thank the City Council for its continuous support of the UFT Teacher Center. I hope this testimony was able to demonstrate to you how our union has stepped up to fill in the gaps the DOE has failed to close. We need the guidance put out by the DOE to reflect the reality that plays out in our schools during this time of remote and hybrid instruction. And while the DOE finds a way to provide better support with technology for our educators, students and parents, you can continue to count on the UFT Teacher Center to be on the front line.

We look forward to working with the city and the state on what these measures could look like. To stay up to date on remote learning from our union's perspective, you can listen to our UFT podcast, "On the Record with Michael Mulgrew," which you can find on any podcast platform. Throughout these difficult times, the UFT reaffirms its commitment to doing whatever is necessary to make sure all students receive the instruction and the academic support they deserve.



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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

### Re: Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement

January 20, 2021

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

Over the past eight months, we have appeared before the City Council multiple times describing the immense barriers our clients have faced to learning during the pandemic and the unprecedented learning loss that has taken place despite the hard work of many educators and DOE staff members. The road to recovery will be long. But with vaccines rolling out, \$54 billion in education funding in the federal COVID-19 relief package passed in December, \$4.3 billion of which will be coming to New York schools, and a COVID-19 relief proposal from President Biden with more than double that amount of funding for schools, the City must bolster its efforts to plan for education recovery.

The City must launch an ambitious COVID-19 educational recovery effort that goes far beyond the plan announced by the Mayor last month. In our limited time today, we would like to outline a few essential principles and critical elements that must be included in this plan:

- The recovery effort must include targeted, evidence-based instructional and social-emotional approaches to address the learning loss and trauma that students have experienced.
- The recovery plan must have a focus on equity and be responsive to the disparate impact of the pandemic and the closure of school buildings on communities of

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color and groups of students who have struggled with remote learning, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students, like many of those living in shelter, who have not had access to high-speed internet to participate in remote learning.

- New supports or supplemental programming must be accessible to students who have struggled the most with remote learning, including those whose parents have low digital literacy or speak a language other than English. While remote programming may be part of the menu of options, the City must not rely on parents to serve as tutors for their children using a digital, internet-based program after school hours.
- The recovery effort should include a summer school component that is open to students who experienced learning loss, including students younger than third grade, and has specialized supports for students with disabilities and English Language Learners. Such summer program should include targeted supports, including matching students who are struggling with reading with educators who are trained in evidence-based literacy interventions, building on work the City did last summer.
- The recovery effort must include a system for students with disabilities to get the compensatory instruction and services they have the legal right to receive, without requiring individual families to file impartial hearings through an already overburdened impartial hearing system in order to exercise the right they have to make-up services under federal law.
- The recovery effort must include specialized support for English Language Learners who went without the bilingual instruction or English as a New Language (ENL) instruction they have the legal right to receive.
- The recovery effort should emphasize areas of longstanding challenge for the City that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including the need for evidence-based literacy instruction and intervention, given that only 36 percent of Black and Latinx students scored proficiently in reading prior to the pandemic and that the City put literacy supports such as the Universal Literacy coaching program on hold this year.
- The recovery effort must also have a major emphasis on and investment in mental health support and trauma-informed care, with the City reimagining school safety, re-allocating NYPD funding to support students, and ensuring students have access to staff who can help support their social-emotional and behavioral needs in police-free schools.
- The recovery effort must include a technological system that ensures all students detained in the juvenile and criminal justice systems have full access to quality general and special education, while maintaining safety and confidentiality.
- The recovery effort must address the needs of both our youngest and oldest learners. It must ensure students who have not been able to earn course credit get



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the support and time they need to make up the work, including students who would normally be forced to age out of school because they have turned 21.

We are counting on the Council to play a leadership role in shaping this education recovery package as the city budget process moves forward and to advocate for the City to get the federal and state resources needed, including ensuring the State does not offset any federal COVID-19 relief education funding with cuts in state education funding. We look forward to speaking with you more in depth about each of these points and others and working with you to help ensure that the learning loss students have experienced does not have ripple effects for generations to come.

We appreciate the hard work of the DOE and the City Council during these difficult times. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



**Testimony of Kaveri Sengupta, Education Policy Coordinator  
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)**

**Committee on Education Remote Hearing  
January 20, 2021 at 11:00AM**

**Introduction**

Good morning. My name is Kaveri Sengupta, and I am the Education Policy Coordinator at the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). Thank you, Chair Treyger and members of the Committees on Education for giving us this opportunity to testify.

Founded in 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization and leads the fight for improved and equitable policies, systems, funding, and services to support those in need. The Asian Pacific American (APA) population comprises over 15% of New York City, over 1.3 million people. Many in our diverse communities face high levels of poverty, overcrowding, uninsurance, and linguistic isolation. Yet, the needs of the APA community are consistently overlooked, misunderstood, and uncared for. We are constantly fighting the harmful impacts of the model minority myth, which prevents our needs from being recognized and understood. Our communities, as well as the organizations that serve the community, too often lack the resources to provide critical services to the most marginalized APAs. Working with over 70 member and partner organizations across the City to identify and speak out on the many common challenges our community faces, CACF is building a community too powerful to ignore.

We work with 70+ organizational members and partners serving the diverse Asian Pacific American, or APA, communities across New York City, and we ask the City Council today to hold our public education system accountable to our communities' needs. Throughout the pandemic, a deep mistrust of the City's government has been spreading throughout communities of color and immigrant communities, fueled in part by the DOE's lack of foresight and preparedness that has sown confusion and resulted in a persistent scarcity of accessible information. Marginalized pockets of the APA community, such as immigrant students, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and others, have seen academic barriers they faced before the pandemic continue to grow during these months.

**Overall Impacts of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement of APAs**

The question of COVID-19's impact on students' academic achievement does not have a clear, cut and dry answer - but it is undoubtedly the case that a lack of adequate attention to high-



quality remote instruction will demotivate students and negatively affect their learning. This issue is particularly critical for APA students, who comprise only 11.5% of all students who opted for in-person instruction when elementary schools opened in December, when they make up 18% of all students enrolled in 3K-5 and D75. Nearly 60% of Asian American students opted for remote learning in October - so the need for excellent remote instruction is especially necessary for our community. However, the reality has not been ideal for our students. Students in our own student leadership program, the Asian American Student Advocacy Project, have reported feeling deeply unmotivated and also express that their grades may not reflect this sentiment. Here, they bring up an important point - traditional grades, even if they are “good,” do not necessarily reflect the academic health of a student, in terms of their interest, engagement, or critical thinking regarding their coursework. Namely, our students have watched their peers master the skill of pretending they are doing the work, perhaps doing just enough to skate by, but in reality they know that their fellow students are disengaged in class - and, critically, their classrooms are not environments that inspire them. Our students are also less driven to exploring long term plans and ambitions, expressing that they believe they should be working toward some kind of goal but that they currently feel blocked from doing so, or even figuring out what that could look like. These stories expose a pressing concern: schools may not be truly cultivating students’ love of learning at this time, which could very much affect their lives after they leave the school system.

Of course, anecdotally, some students have thrived in a remote setting, able to focus more on their schoolwork and avoid distractions or potential bullying in the school building - and we must pay attention to these experiences as well, since they can help to inform how educational practices can improve post-COVID. We have to pay attention to what worked and adapt it. Still, we must uplift those who have found it immensely challenging to keep up in a virtual environment - who may have very little space to themselves in their households to engage fully in school or homework, who may have unreliable internet access or may not even have received a device yet, or who may, for a variety of reasons, need a wholly immersive environment to achieve academic success. These students often tend to be our most marginalized, who face barrier after barrier when it comes to learning and achievement.

COVID has given the education system the opportunity to reimagine so much of traditional schooling to benefit our most marginalized learners and, therefore, all of our learners. We see the potential to move toward a system that transcends rote test-taking, unreliable during COVID and insufficient at all times, and instead measures student success through multiple, non-traditional methods focused on holistic development. We can rethink lecture based classes, which are even less engaging in a virtual setting, as well as develop new ways to sustain class discussion and participation to foster diverse opportunities for all students to engage in material.

COVID has also exposed why we must rethink harmful systemwide educational policies. For decades, the perceived success of APA communities has continually been used to perpetuate policies such as discriminatory admissions screens, including the SHSAT, as well as ability grouping through Gifted and Talented programs, all while these policies are based on false notions of “merit” and are rife with equity concerns. We applaud the DOE’s decision to scrap the G&T exam for next year - no admissions decision should be made based on a single test score, especially at such a young age - but administering the test this year is a decision that ignores that equity and access issues have only worsened for a great deal of our families. Data have continued to show us that in reality, only a small percentage of APA students benefit from these policies. We must take this opportunity to reinvest in a system that prioritizes and is fully responsive to equity and access issues - one that truly provides a safe, supportive, and high-quality education for all.

**Relevant statistics:**

- APA students comprise 18% of all students in grades 3-K through 5 and those in District 75. They made up 11.5% of all students who opted for in-person instruction when elementary schools opened in December.<sup>1</sup>
- In October, seven out of 10 Asian American students opted out of in-person classes citywide, a higher rate than that of any other ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 60% of Asian American students opted into fully remote learning.<sup>3</sup>
  - Due to a number of reasons: multigenerational households, community was second-hardest hit in NYC when evaluating the increase of death overall this year compared to before the pandemic, abundance of caution about infection due to awareness of the threat beforehand (particularly for Chinese families).<sup>4</sup>
- 40% of NYC APA youth are not college ready upon graduation of high school.
- Nearly 25% of all English language learners in New York City public schools are Asian Pacific American.
- In NYC, APA communities have been hit extremely hard by COVID, with 58 percent losing employment income between March and July 2020, 50 percent of renters with little or no confidence in paying August rent,<sup>5</sup> and a 25.6 percent unemployment rate in May.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.the74million.org/article/nyc-releases-racial-breakdown-for-in-person-student-learning/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/14/nyregion/nyc-coronavirus-schools-reopening.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cityandstateny.com/articles/policy/education/why-nyc-asian-american-students-are-opting-remote-learning.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cssny.org/news/entry/race-and-the-economic-fallout-from-covid-19-in-new-york-city>

<sup>6</sup> <https://documentedny.com/2020/10/23/asian-american-new-yorkers-see-highest-unemployment-growth/>

**Recommendations to address the APA community's needs, along with the needs of other communities of color:**

- Disaggregate data to better understand disparities in academic outcomes of APA students from different ethnic and/or language backgrounds, so that we are able to target necessary academic interventions and support to groups who continue to face barriers.
- Develop and incorporate tools and strategies for instruction of English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners, who benefit from in-person immersion and have found remote learning very challenging.<sup>7</sup>
- Fully equip students with disabilities with services they are entitled to.
- Provide limited English proficient families of students with disabilities all necessary information and resources in-language so that they are able to support their students at home.
- Include CBO resources on cultural responsiveness in the one stop digital learning hub announced as part of the 2021 Student Achievement Plan, so they are easily accessible and usable.
- Equip teachers to implement best practices in remote/digital instruction in all classrooms with comprehensive professional development opportunities.
- Implement culturally responsive curricula, which positively affect academic outcomes<sup>8</sup>.
- Hire diverse teachers, guidance counselors, and social workers (specifically, more APA and/or multilingual educators) so that students are able to see themselves reflected in their school community, which also positively impacts student achievement.<sup>9</sup>

**Deeper Dive into Specific Recommendations**

**Data Disaggregation**

**We need DOE to collect and make transparent accurate data and disaggregation of data on the academic outcomes of students (including standardized test scores and graduation rates, among other measures) by ethnicity, gender, home language, ELL status, ability, and socioeconomic status, provide the ability to cross reference between categories, and analyze disparities in these data.** When APA students are mentioned, the dominant narrative within education espouses that they are uniformly academically excellent - their grades and standardized test scores are higher than those of students of different races, they are more likely to graduate, and more likely to attend college.<sup>10</sup> This discussion allows the damaging model

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/nyregion/coronavirus-english-language-students.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244016660744>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-importance-of-a-diverse-teaching-force/#:~:text=conclusion,their%20same%20race%20or%20ethnicity.>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/111/23/8416>





minority myth to perpetuate, preserving the problematic notion that APA students “have it all together” and diminishing the real needs our students have. It also perpetuates the racist idea that students of color from other backgrounds do not try as hard. Other times, as was the case for the December McKinsey report on learning loss (a problematic term, due to its reliance on the assumption that learning is something that can be easily gained or lost, but one that remains relevant to many policymakers and officials looking to improve academic outcomes) during the pandemic, APA students are not mentioned whatsoever.<sup>11</sup> The report, which was widely disseminated upon its release, completely neglects to mention how APA students (who make up about 6 percent of the country’s public school students)<sup>12</sup> are counted in its analysis. When reports like these, generated by powerful companies that have real influence on the way educational systems are run across the country, omit the existence of an entire group of people, they encourage those systems to do the same. The City must fight against these tendencies by collecting and disaggregating data.

Lumping all APA students together as though the community is a monolith is a deeply flawed practice, because it overlooks the profound diversity within the APA community and therefore ignores the disparate impact that COVID-19 has very likely had on pockets of our communities. Namely, it erases the experiences of APAs such as English Language Learners, students with disabilities, low-income students, immigrant students (specifically those who are undocumented, refugee, and/or newly arrived), students in temporary housing, students facing homelessness, and students from underrepresented ethnic and language backgrounds, including those with families facing linguistic isolation due to requiring services in low-incidence languages -- all of whom may be experiencing pronounced academic difficulties, but are hidden within aggregated data. Ethnic background and languages spoken - as well as the linkage between the two - are critical data points that need to be captured to give all of our students a voice, and to give the education system the opportunity to address the needs that are uncovered.

To be clear, because we remain completely in the dark about how APA students from different backgrounds are performing academically in New York City and New York State, we must look to data from other states to attempt to ascertain this. From studies that have been conducted in Washington, we know that for the 2013-2014 school year, the graduation rate for Cambodian and Laotian students was below 70 percent, while it was at 95 percent for Japanese and Taiwanese students.<sup>13</sup> Researchers in Washington report that Laotian, Cambodian, and students of other ethnic groups face great structural barriers to their education, but school officials do not notice

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<sup>11</sup><https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>

<sup>12</sup> <http://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AAPIData-CAP-report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><https://edsources.org/2019/schools-lack-a-clear-view-of-asian-and-pacific-islander-discipline-disparities-study-finds/610189>



these disparities and disregard their needs. We fear that similar patterns with APA ethnic groups may be present in NYC, but we still lack the data to fully understand these nuances. As a whole, though, as has been the case for other students, one prediction is that the COVID crisis has only caused existing disparities to grow and become more pronounced. It is therefore likely that marginalized pockets of the APA community are experiencing academic challenges that have exacerbated due to the pandemic.

### **English Language Learners**

**DOE must develop tools and strategies for instruction of English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners, who benefit greatly from in-person immersion and generally find that remote learning does not suit their needs, and ensure that educators implement them in classrooms.** Our member organizations have reported that COVID-19 has had a particularly detrimental impact on English language learners. One organization working directly in a school has seen a rise in students coming to their program specifically for academic support. Our partners expressed concern for students who lack access to the kinds of support their program offers because their schools do not have the resources or partnerships necessary, or because the students themselves are still unequipped with devices or reliable internet.

ELL students find remote learning especially difficult, particularly if they live in multi-generational households and have no choice but to attend virtual classes in common spaces. These circumstances result in students often feeling unable to turn on their mics and engage with class, and therefore miss vital opportunities to acquire spoken language acquisition skills. For example, one high school sophomore is experiencing a great deal of academic stress, as she lives with her family of four in a tight space without privacy. Her parents are not consistently working due to COVID-related schedule changes, and she finds it difficult to concentrate due to the noise in her home. This student was previously struggling with academics, and remote learning has compounded the difficulty - she feels she does not understand most of the material and is too far behind, she does not want to turn on the mic due to the noise and is consequently unable to talk to her teachers, and overall, she feels ashamed to ask for help.

Another typical situation illustrating the challenge is of an ELL high school sophomore who lives with her mother and older sister, and was left to navigate government websites on immigration and benefits resources and updates for her family after travel restrictions led to her sister getting stuck in China from before the pandemic to late October. Her sister's return meant that it fell on this student to contact the DOE to find a school for her older sister as well as tutor her sister on academics because she is struggling with the language barrier and remote learning. Her mother recently fell sick as well, and this student is responsible for gathering information about the vaccine and ensuring that her mother is able to receive it. This student is juggling these



extremely challenging circumstances, often during class time, while also learning remotely and completing her schoolwork as the marking period nears its end. Clearly, COVID has had and continues to have a significant harmful impact on this student's learning, as well as her sister's.

### **Students with Disabilities:**

**DOE must fully equip students with disabilities with services they are entitled to, and improve remote instruction for these students by ensuring that best practice resources are implemented by teachers (rather than simply available for use, but never actually used).**

**Create a plan to support teachers and service providers with opening a dialogue with families outside of instructional time, to create a coherent strategy for the upcoming year. Prioritize language access whenever outreach to families is needed.** One of our membership organizations serving APA students with disabilities, particularly those from Chinese and Korean families with limited English proficiency, report that for large numbers of students with disabilities, COVID has caused families to become teachers. Parents must ensure that their children are following in front of the computer, something that is already difficult for their children, and also tough for parents who may not understand what is going on in the classroom due to language barriers. The organization explains that currently, there is no real way to determine if a child is making progress. Many parents in this situation feel helpless or give up, and are resorting to simply wait until COVID is over for their children to receive an adequate education. The organization has seen that these difficulties have resulted in children regressing rather than making progress - and have not seen best practice resources provided by the DOE or guidance by the federal government being put into practice in the classroom.

**Improve and update Assistive Technology (AT) access for remote learning.** AT is imperative for children with limited verbal skills or any type of sensory issue to be able to learn, but many students who receive these services in their IEP are not able to do so remotely. We have heard that there is a lack of clear instruction and follow-up regarding updates and other software issues with the technology. Once again, the problem is compounded for parents with language barriers, who do not know where or how to ask for AT implementation. Our member organization has described that they have seen very little attention paid to this issue.

### **Conclusion**

As we continue to live in a COVID world, in which existing disparities continue to grow, we must be sure to center all of our decisions on our most marginalized students and avoid neglecting those who may have previously been ignored. Our communities are consistently overlooked in the distribution of resources, which is harmful to us as well as other communities of color who are



denied the same resources due to the perceived “success” of APAs. This pandemic has highlighted a myriad of holes in our City’s safety net systems, and the City’s response must address root problems in addition to immediate needs. Our community will continue to suffer every day we allow these flaws in the system to exist. As always, CACF will continue to be available as a resource and partner to address these concerns and look forward to working with you to better address our communities’ needs.



**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  
Oversight - Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement.

### **Committee on Education**

January 20, 2021

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 Education committee for holding today's hearing on student learning and academic achievement.

There are many unknowns when it comes to assessing learning and achievement during this unprecedented school year. The academic metrics we often use to measure success have been difficult to capture, and assessments such as state proficiency and Regents exams have been suspended, and for good reason. However, there are many things we do know about the current student learning experience, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that inform the actions that need be taken quickly and effectively to improve student learning this school year.

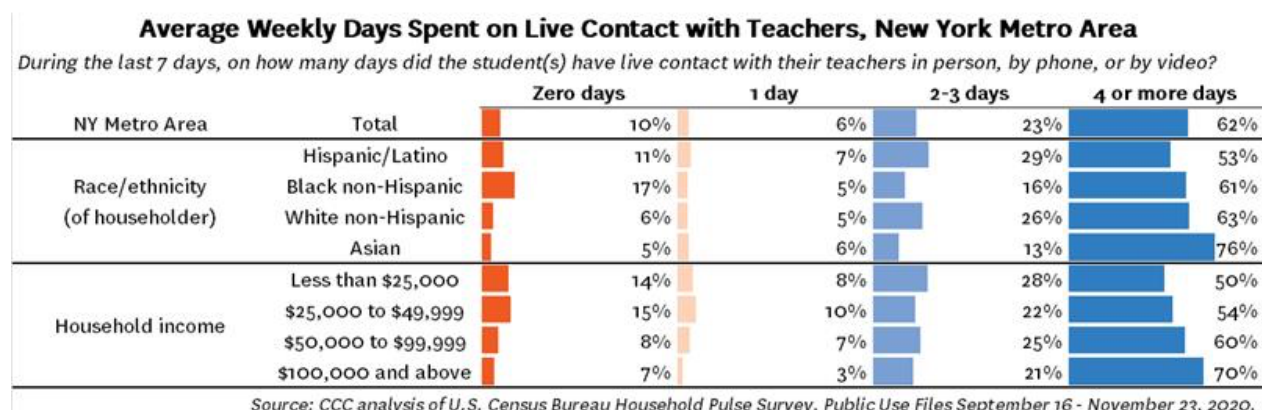
CCC was pleased to see Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza announce their 2021 Student Achievement Plan, including the development of a digital learning hub and efforts to assess the ground that has been lost post-COVID. But we also believe that much more can be done right now to limit that loss, including addressing equity issues by improving remote access, targeted interventions for students that face the most risks, and supporting the entire educational continuum.

**The Dept. of Education and administration must work towards more equitable live instruction and develop plans to directly address disparate learning loss based on race and income-level.**

Due to both remote access issues as well as the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color, a significant disparity in live instruction has emerged in New York City this school year.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, between September and November of 2020, Black households in the NY Metro Area were almost *three times* as likely as white households to report *zero* days of live contact with a teacher in the past week. Hispanic households were almost twice as likely as white households to report zero days of live contact.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, 76% of Asian households and 63% of white households reported having live contact with a teacher 4 or more days in the past week, compared to only 61% and 53% of Black and Hispanic households respectively. Similar discrepancies in live contact are observed based on income as well, with just 50% of households earning \$25,000 or less reporting 4 or more days of live contact with teachers.<sup>2</sup>



During this period of partial or full-time remote learning, Black and brown students in New York City are receiving an education with far lower rates of live instruction and live contact, whether in-person or remote, than their white and Asian peers. Although the extent of learning loss will remain unknown for some time, it is clear that the racial achievement gap will widen as a result of COVID.

The discrepancy in live contact with teachers is a result of several compounding factors, which must immediately be addressed. First, remote access issues are still today widely evident in the city, even ten months after the onset of COVID-19. Learning devices, computer hardware like keyboards and headphones, and most importantly access to WiFi and internet hotspots, and other

<sup>1</sup> The NY Metro area encompasses a population of 19 million around New York-Newark-Jersey City, and live contact included in person, by phone, or by video.

<sup>2</sup> CCC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Public Use Files September 16 - November 23, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html>.



needs continue to warrant ongoing prioritization by the administration and Dept. of Education for the remainder of the school year, no matter how many schools are offering in-person learning.

Second, disparate rates of families opting to return to school, also contributes to unequal live instruction. As of December, white students made up a quarter of students back in classrooms, despite comprising only 16% of all students. Black students on the other hand, were only 18% of students back in classrooms, despite comprising 25% of all students.<sup>3</sup> This overrepresentation of white students and underrepresentation of Black students in in-person instruction corroborates a survey conducted late last year, which showed 61% of parents of color were very concerned about their child contracting the virus, compared to 52% of white parents. Parents of color were also less likely to switch their child from remote learning back to hybrid or in-person if given the option.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the disproportionate negative impact the virus has had on communities of color, it is not surprising we see real differences across racial lines in which families opt to receive in-person instruction and which continue to opt for remote learning. To address the likely deepening of race inequity in educational outcomes, the DOE and administration must focus on improving quality of both in-person instruction and remote learning.

### **Vulnerable student populations continue to need targeted supports and interventions.**

In order to truly impact student learning and achievement, intervention efforts must target groups that already had some of the biggest obstacles to success before the pandemic, and whose challenges have only been exacerbated by the remote school year.

Before the pandemic English language learners in the DOE had some of the worst academic outcomes of any subgroup of students, with higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates despite their vast potential. Remote learning has exacerbated these disparate outcomes, and the DOE must target supports for English-language learners during this school year, over the summer, and into the fall. These efforts should include grants for CBOs who work in immigrant communities and already offer academic support for English language learners, as well as in-person or virtual system-wide offerings to help ELLs catch up, in addition to a robust communication plan that prioritizes the way immigrant families receive information from their children's school.

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<sup>3</sup> Shapiro, Eliza. "12,000 More White Children Return to N.Y.C. Schools Than Black Children." *The New York Times*. December 8, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/08/nyregion/ny-schools-reopening-inequality.html>.

<sup>4</sup> The Education Trust-New York. "Re: New York State Parents' Survey Identifies Disparities and Priorities for Current School Year." Survey conducted by Global Strategy Group, October 16<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. [https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NY-Public-School-Parents-Memo\\_October.pdf](https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NY-Public-School-Parents-Memo_October.pdf).

Children and families experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity also warrant particular attention. Students in temporary housing, including those in shelters or doubled-up, often lack access to a reliable internet connection, or a personal device of their own, or both. Moreover, they are more likely to lack the adequate physical space necessary to learn remotely, especially if shared with siblings who are also engaged in remote-learning. Students in temporary housing may also need additional adult support if caregivers are working, to set up their access or guide them throughout the school day. And while the administration announced plans to install Wi-Fi at every homeless shelter, they now say the project will not be complete until this summer at the earliest.<sup>5</sup>

We cannot expect students to successfully engage, learn, and succeed when they continue to struggle just to access school. CCC urges the administration to take several actions to support these students, including;

- expedite its Wi-Fi installation at shelters
- immediately fulfill any outstanding device requests
- provide reliable consistent technological support, and
- fill the more than 20 vacant positions dedicated to students who are homeless within the Department – (including six STH Regional Manager positions and a dozen Family Assistant, Community Coordinator, and Bridging the Gap social worker positions).

**The city must restore funding and prevent any future cuts to extra-curricular programs that combat learning loss.**

Afterschool and summer programs have always played a pivotal role in combatting learning loss and providing academic enrichment opportunities for children and youth. Before COVID, over 222,000 students relied on DYCD-funded afterschool programs, and approximately 175,000 relied on summer programs.<sup>6</sup> At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring and throughout last summer, CBOs in the youth development sector quickly pivoted to provide remote and socially-distant services to support children and families, including school enrichment programs, academic help, arts and crafts, health and mental health services, and food for those suffering from food insecurity.

Moving forward, afterschool and summer programs must be an integral part of the city’s plan to enhance student achievement and make up for lost ground, and they absolutely cannot sustain

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<sup>5</sup> Goldberg, Noah. “Homeless Families Sue the City over Wi-Fi Installation, Demand Internet by January 2021.” *NY Daily News*. November 24, 2020. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-homeless-families-shelters-wifi-internet-remote-school-de-blasio-20201124-imulnd36cvfwvhdvbebxthf6yi-story.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Citizens’ Committee for Children of NY. “Youth Services in NYC: Who They Serve and Why They are Necessary to a COVID Recovery Plan.” May 8, 2020. <https://cccnewyork.org/youth-services-in-nyc-who-they-serve-and-why-they-are-necessary-to-a-covid-recovery-plan/>.

any cuts in funding in the current year or the city's FY 2022 budget. During this school-year and into next, students will need these programs to recover, thrive and continue to grow and develop.

Additionally, the city cannot place an emphasis on achievement while cutting holistic student supports that offer vast benefits like community schools. Community schools, which serve 135,000 students and families citywide<sup>7</sup>, already suffered a \$9 million cut last year.<sup>8</sup> If those funds cannot be restored in next year's budget at the very least they cannot be reduced any further. NYC community schools offer wrap-around supports for students and families, including upstream prevention services like food pantries and benefit enrollment help, in addition to direct mental health services in the form of counselors, social workers and school-based mental health clinics. These supports have been shown to have positive effects on outcomes like attendance, grade progression, math achievement and reductions in disciplinary incidents.<sup>9</sup> If the city wants to truly prioritize student achievement and recovery in the next school year, community schools are the type of programs they should be investing in, not cutting.

**Any efforts to improve student achievement must be paired with investments and strategies to expand behavioral health supports in schools.**

As a result of COVID-19, children and teens are grappling with unprecedented economic deprivation, housing insecurity, loneliness, disrupted and disjointed schooling, and a grave loss of life in their families and local communities. Furthermore, with the transition to distance learning, many children have lost a source of stability and routine and may experience feelings of social isolation and anxiety. Additionally, the shuttering of schools has impaired the ability to identify and connect or maintain continuity of student's access to clinical services. For all of these reasons it is imperative that students' behavioral health is and continues to be a priority for the administration and Dept. of Education.

CCC previously testified at the City Council hearing on social-emotional learning and support staff in schools. We believe that the city must protect children and families from harmful cuts to behavioral health services, invest in trauma-informed care, reject punitive approaches that cause harm, and develop a cross-agency plan for reaching disconnected students.

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<sup>7</sup> NYC Mayor's Office. "Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza Announce Success of Community Schools: Increased Academic Outcomes Across City." Press Release. January 28, 2020. <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/046-20/mayor-de-blasio-chancellor-carranza-success-community-schools-increased-academic#/0>.

<sup>8</sup> Elsen-Rooney, Michael. "Budget Cuts Smaller Than Expected for NYC School Support Programs." *NY Daily News*. October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/ny-school-support-budget-cuts-20201029-zgkureiv6jb5znarh76x2uwere-story.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston, William R., John Engberg, Isaac M. Oppen, Lisa Sontag-Padilla, and Lea Xenakis, Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative. City of New York, 2020. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3245.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html).

We are supportive of the Mayor's new initiatives to introduce a School Mental Health Specialist Program and partner with NYC Health + Hospitals to improve referrals to outpatient mental health clinics for schools hardest hit by COVID-19. If effective, we believe this model should be extended to non profit community-based clinics, in addition to H+H sites.

However, improving referral pathways is not a substitute for increasing capacity. Even in the face of budget restrictions, NYC must strengthen supports for the full continuum of behavioral supports for students, including through Article 31 School-Based Mental Health clinics reaching greater numbers of younger students in schools and particularly elementary and middle schools. Only by investing in behavioral health services now can we prevent the need for more intensive services as children grow older and face the harms and complications of unmet mental health needs.

## **Conclusion**

As vaccinations efforts ramp up the city can and should begin to envision and plan for a time when students are back in school buildings and learning in person. But there is still much action needed to improve student learning right now while it is remote, and to develop a plan that puts equity, vulnerable students, and their social-emotional health at the forefront of a recovery.



**Testimony of Sandra Escamilla, Executive Vice President, Children's Aid**

**Submitted Testimony – Education Hearing 1/20/21**

**Student Learning and Academic Achievement**

My name is Sandra Escamilla, Executive Vice President at Children's Aid. I would like to thank Chair Mark Treyger and the members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on student learning and academic achievement during these trying times. We hope to express the ways in which during the pandemic, community-based organizations (CBOs) who partner with schools as a part of the city's community school initiative have been crucial supports to students.

For more than 168 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. 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.

For over 25 years, Children's Aid has operated community schools in partnership with the New York City Department of Education. We believe the community schools strategy effectively removes the barriers to learning that get in the way of youth success – both academically and socially—and we believe this strategy is more relevant than ever right now. At our community schools, we integrate expanded learning programs, comprehensive health services (physical, mental health, dental, and vision), and family engagement strategies into each school building so that school staff can focus on teaching and children can focus on learning. 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. Our community schools focus on the needs of the “whole child” to improve student learning, strengthen families, and foster healthy communities. If family struggles become critical, our social workers bring stability. And because navigating the transition to adulthood is crucial, we are there to help teens reach college or career and, ultimately, independence. As a powerhouse of solutions, these are only a few of the many strategies Children’s Aid utilizes to support our communities every step of the way on the path to overcoming poverty.

During this crisis, Children’s Aid and other CBO-partners in schools have continued this work. We have played a crucial role in filling in many of the gaps in services that are causing real challenges for NYC students and families that are major barriers to student academic achievement, and can cause students to fall behind. Our staff has conducted 1:1 calls, emails, and zooms to check in with families on how remote learning/access were going, whether food was available, and general inquiry about needs and/or provision of community resources. We were also able to collaborate with our Go Healthy program and other support services to provide grab and go meals, food boxes and bags, and face masks to families. Because of the connection we have as a founding member of the Boys and Girls Club of America, we have been able to leverage additional food to serve thousands of meals as well as PPE for staff, youth, and families. In addition to food, we have tried to pick up the slack to support the DOE and distributed and provided technical assistance with devices to children who needed them. Our staff has also been providing remote mental health, counseling, teletherapy, and social emotional support sessions for both students and parents. Our mental health support has been crucial; many of our students and families are facing real loss, fear, anxiety about the future, and depression. The way our staff jumped into action was the way community schools all across the city did, as well. Community schools are designed to adapt to the challenges and barriers facing families that have been worsened by the pandemic.

New York City has the largest community schools portfolio in the country, and this initiative recently received attention from a favorable [RAND report](#) that published various measures of success of the program. New York City’s community schools (NYC-CS) were found to have a positive impact on student attendance in all school levels, and across all three years of the study. We know that attendance is absolutely crucial for student achievement, and community schools’ holistic approach to combating chronic absenteeism is a main tenant of its strategy. The study also found that NYC-CS led to a reduction in disciplinary incidents for elementary and middle school students, and had a positive impact on math achievement and credit accumulation. There was also evidence that NYC-CS supported improvement in school climate for elementary and middle schools, had a positive impact on credit accumulation for high school students, and had a positive impact on on-time grade progression.





Children's Aid community schools' most recent data reflect many similar positive outcomes in academic achievement and student success. 62% of participants in our targeted chronic absence intervention in K-8 community schools improved their attendance in 2018-19. In 2018-19, 94% of our K-8 community schools exceeded the city percent ELA proficiency, and 76% exceeded proficiency of their peer schools. The same year, 100% of our K-8 community schools exceeded the city percent of math proficiency, and 82% exceeded proficiency of their peer schools. In our high schools, 99% of our youth were accepted to College (of those that applied) last year. And 87% of our cohort of high school graduates enrolled in college in Fall of 2019 persisted to the next semester.

Multiple national education think tanks and organizations, from the [Brookings Institute](#) to the [Learning Policy Institute](#) to the [Hechinger Report](#), have called for the community schools approach to be expanded when considering roadmaps for transforming education after the pandemic. New York City has been seen as a national leader in this strategy. Despite all of this, and despite the success of the city's program, the Mayor's administration cut \$9.16 million from the Department of Education's Community Schools Initiative this summer, without substantive public scrutiny. The cut represented a \$3.16 million cut for schools under the Community Schools Grant Initiative (CSGI), as well as a \$6 million cut to general community schools contracts. After a concerted months-long campaign against the cuts led by advocates, students, parents, principals, and school-staff, the city issued a partial restoration of \$6M to the program. But this will still devastate smaller contracts at many community schools, and the status of the program's funding for FY21 is still unclear. We don't know whether we'll be starting the fiscal year with a full \$9.16M deficit, and we don't know whether the upcoming RFP for community schools CBO partners will be affected. We were pleased to hear the Mayor's recent announcement that he aims to expand the Community Schools Initiative to at least 27 schools in areas hardest hit by COVID-19, but there is confusion in the field as well, because the cuts have yet to be restored. It is unclear how the city can expand this program without restoring the cuts made. We also hope that CBO partners will be brought to the table to be involved with this expansion. This is the right place for the city's investment, but it must be a fully resourced plan.

We are recommending **full restoration** of the cuts to this program as soon as possible because we truly believe that the community schools strategy is the path forward to ensure students are not left behind by this crisis. [The research is clear](#) that students learn better when their various physical and socio-emotional needs are met and when they have significant relationships with caring adults. If students are coming to their classes hungry; dealing with the stress of living in temporary housing; receiving inadequate mental or physical health care; or dealing with other social-emotional or economic hardships that have been exacerbated by this pandemic, it will



only be that much harder to focus on academics. The community schools strategy addresses those barriers to learning by partnering with community based organizations in holistic and innovative ways. This kind of strategy is the path forward to ensure that students can continue to learn during this time, and that socio-economic and racial disparities don't become even more of a barrier to young people reaching their full potential.

The Education Advisory Council that the Mayor empaneled earlier in the pandemic recommended a reopening framework rooted in the community school model. Community schools in New York City are already well-equipped to support the diverse and unprecedented needs of children and families as we continue to move through this crisis. To not fully fund community schools now when they are needed more than ever would be devastating to the communities they serve. In order to move towards recovery, these social-emotional and trauma-informed approaches to school and learning must be prioritized so that young people will not have their futures derailed by this crisis. Community schools largely serve the young people and communities hardest hit by COVID, that are overwhelmingly low-income and of color. To cut the essential services and staff that support these communities right now is unconscionable. Community schools must be fully funded and invested in for an equitable path to academic achievement and student success.

As an agency committed to eradicating poverty in the neighborhoods that we serve, we will do all that we can to advocate, protect, and increase funding for the most under-resourced students and families in NYC. We understand the challenges the City faces to meet the needs of NYC young people, especially given the academic and social-emotional challenges of families that have been exacerbated through this crisis. Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York City Council for their vigorous support of children, youth, families, and communities in New York City, and we emphasize that we can be your partners to address the immediate needs of students and their families as we look to the months ahead.

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.



Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.

Testimony at the New York City Council

Committee on Education Hearing on Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and

Academic Achievement Oversight

Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair

January 20, 2021

Thank you Chair Treyger and the Members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community based- organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 60,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities. To that end, we are grateful to testify about issues that impact the individuals and families we serve, and we are grateful to the Council for their leadership on these issues.

***CPC's testimony addresses the following concerns: Child Regression and Decrease in Quality of Programming, Community Based Support Capacity, Lack of Transparency and Language Access***

***Child Regression and Decrease in Quality of Programming***

CPC's Early Childhood and School Age Centers are critical safety nets for thousands of working-class, AAPI, and immigrant families. In addition to providing childcare for low-income families, CPC's Childhood Development Services (CDS) staff are instrumental in supporting the growth of children of color with disabilities. During COVID-19, when schools closed and services shifted to a remote setting, CPC's CDS staff continued to provide their services nonstop, and creatively integrated their programming onto an online format. However, the lack of support and funding from the city has made it even more challenging to implement creative programming that meets the learning and developmental needs of children during COVID-19, and this has resulted in concerning childhood developmental regression.

The following anecdotal example of childhood regression is about a child with disabilities who enrolled in one of CPC's Childhood Centers when she was two years old. When she entered in the program, she was unable to speak any words. Through CPC's support, she was able to speak in coherent sentences at three years old. When COVID-19 hit and services shifted to remote, this child was unable to access their teletherapy sessions due to the language, digital, and financial barriers that her family encountered. Once CPC's Childhood Center reopened this fall, this child returned and was unable to speak in coherent sentences anymore. In six months, she had regressed two developmental years - back to speaking single word phrases.



Children with disabilities require paras (paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities with communication, instructional, and behavioral support), as well as services that are difficult to maintain through online systems due to the lack of equitable funding designated to support families who experience digital and linguistic barriers. In CPC Learning Bridges and Learning Labs, our students are coming In Person during their REMOTE Days. There is an urgent need for a Para for our Special Needs IN Person students. Some parents with children who need extra support for their disabilities are also reporting that they are **just now** receiving their learning devices, even though they applied for them back when the pandemic first started in the US, in March 2020. Some students still have not received their learning devices. Along with the digital literacy gap disproportionately affecting working class immigrant parents, as well as the Broadband barrier affecting majority working class and Communities of Color, the lack of accountable follow through with providing digital learning devices is yet another systemic barrier that prevents working-class Children of Color from learning. These systemic inequities impact low-income children of color and children with disabilities and immigrant-serving CBOs such as CPC end up taking on the mantle to support these children through interruptions to their cognitive development. **CPC calls for equitable investment in community-led Early Childhood services, the integration of intentional community outreach for families with digital and linguistic barriers, and provision of training on school reopening guidelines for community-based childhood centers to adequately support low-income immigrant families as NYC schools reopen.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has also been detrimental to children's mental health, which affects their academic performance and long term development. The disruption from in person learning and prolonged isolation has increased students' stress and anxiety. Fourth graders in CPC programs are asking questions such as, "what if it stays like this forever, what if my parents die, what if we don't have anymore money. why ...why do I need too...nothing will change," and they breakdown in tears from sadness and frustration trying to get answers. The overwhelming sense of uncertainty, grief, and hopelessness weigh heavily on students' minds, leaving them unmotivated and unable to focus in the classroom. Additionally, students carry onto their families' pain and loss, and are unable to receive the proper mental health support to fully process and heal from their traumas. CPC staff are not professionally trained to provide the comprehensive mental health supports students need, and may experience vicarious trauma from consoling students as well. Additionally, many staff are living through the same stress, anxiety, and dilemmas the children are feeling. Social Services workers need to be better trained and equipped on what signs to look for in mental illness specifically in young children, in addition to how to address it appropriately. **CPC demands that the City ensures CBO's receives the same equitable support in mental health for the children they service as the DOE.**

### ***Community Based Support Capacity***

Since COVID-19, CPC Childhood Centers continued to support families remotely without an increase in staff capacity. CPC staff provide synchronized blended lessons to accommodate for children learning remotely. However, in order to follow social distancing guidelines, staff separate the children at the site physically - which makes it hard to maintain engagement and interaction with young children. Without proper guidance and support from the city to increase CPC's capacity, CPC staff have to make difficult decisions as to whether to properly adhere to social distancing guidelines or sacrifice the critical social engagement period for healthy childhood development. With only a decrease in license capacity 5%-10% overall, there is no guarantee that children can safely social distance, leaving many families hesitant about bringing their children back to school.



In addition to the lack of staff capacity, community centers such as CPC were awarded Birth to Five RFP slated to start in July 2021 and due to limited slots awarded, many sites will be forced to shut down classrooms – sometimes losing vital CPC staff. Our CPC staff not only attend to their students' needs, but they also field worried parents' anxieties whose children are placed on waitlists due to classroom closures. Without culturally competent childcare options, working class immigrant parents are left with little to no choice regarding whether or not they should stay home to take care of their children, or continue essential employment to put food on the table.

During COVID-19, AAPI unemployment claims have increased by 6900% in comparison to last year. Lines for free meal distribution events wrap around the block, and CPC staff have supported thousands of families navigate through different relief programs provided by City, State, and Federal level governments. At CPC's Early Childhood sites, without an increase in funding from the City, any increase in meal distribution comes out of the individual site's program budget. Whether or not a child gets fed should not depend on an individual organization and agency's own resources. **Therefore, CPC demands increased investments funding for CBO run Early Childcare Centers, which provide necessary childcare services for working-class immigrant families.**

i

#### ***Lack of Transparency and Language Access***

COVID-19 has exacerbated systemic injustices and has left many of our low-income and immigrant families without adequate resources to navigate unemployment and surface-level relief packages. CPC staff remain on the frontlines of the essential workforce, and have prepared and adapted to the ever-shifting policies throughout the past six months. However, critical information is still getting lost through the cracks, and CBOs such as CPC are left out of crucial communication around school reopening guidelines.

In early July, DOE issued a survey for families to opt into blended or remote learning with very little details around the logistics behind the blended and remote formats. In mid-September, the DOE sent out a bulletin mentioning that there is no funding allocated for blended and remote learning, leaving CBOs and families with no time to respond. Not only are updates around COVID-19 not reaching CBOs in a timely manner, but there is also no transparency regarding current allocated funds and what they are designated for. The DOE finally explained that they have no control since they request for blended learning through a state waiver. Unfortunately, when CPC learns the information, they are providing to us on the spot. As a result, CPC staff do not have proper guidelines and cannot respond efficiently to the families we serve, increasing the risks of COVID-19 exposure in our programs. Working-class immigrant families face the impossible decision of whether or not they can risk their livelihoods to put their children in school. These families have to bring their children into in-person centers because they cannot afford childcare or extra support programs for their child.

Additionally, wait times for families who receive HRA Childcare Vouchers are extremely long. Families have not received answers since September of 2020, and they remain in limbo as their applications remain unprocessed by HRA. In the cases of ACS, families who have resubmitted applications multiple times still are receiving little to no answers in regard to their childcare options. The responses currently provided by ACS only cover remote services, which does not begin to provide the support that working-class families need.





Even families that are able to apply for CPC's programs face difficulties with receiving adequate information to make the best choices for their needs. CPC's Learning Bridges/Learning Labs programs exemplify this problem. Currently, CPC Learning Bridges/Labs provide interpretation of schoolwork services for immigrant and LEP (Limited English Proficiency) families. Families apply for the program online and then choose one Learning Bridges Center to send their child to. The website shows multiple Learning Bridges Center locations across multiple boroughs, but do not provide any information regarding which languages are provided at each Learning Bridges/Labs Center. Parents are therefore ill-equipped to make informed decisions for their child, and there is no assurance of whether or not Learning Bridges/Labs students are able to receive the services in the languages they need. This information needs to be disseminated with full transparency and Learning Bridges/Labs need to be held accountable to providing the adequate services for the populations they serve.

**With all of the above in mind, CPC strongly demands for transparency and accountability in disseminating COVID-19 related guidelines and the full spectrum of services provided to community run childhood centers and NYC schools in working-class neighborhoods. Additionally, agencies need to hire competent workers from the immigrant communities that they serve in order to meet the learning needs of LEP communities.**

### ***Closing***

Early Childhood centers and schools are critical social safety nets that cannot afford to be jeopardized by the COVID-19 pandemic. The city needs to prioritize investing in working-class communities of color and community-led efforts of recovery in order for NYC to be able to fully recover from COVID-19. All of these recommendations are only the beginning in providing the care our community members deserve. CPC appreciates the opportunity to testify on these issues that so greatly impact the communities we serve and look forward to working with you on them.

If you have any questions, please contact Mary Cheng at [mcheng@cpc-nyc.org](mailto:mcheng@cpc-nyc.org)



**The New York City Council Committee on Education and Committee on Health  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**Oversight: Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement  
January 20th, 2021**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition**

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for this opportunity to testify. My name is Andrea Ortiz and I am the Manager of Education Policy for K-12 at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC). The NYIC is an advocacy and policy umbrella organization for more than 200 multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-sector groups across the state working with immigrants and refugees. We deeply appreciate City Council leaders' leadership during these unprecedented and devastating times. I want to especially thank Chair Treyger for his bold, tireless advocacy on behalf of all our public school families, educators and school staff.

We are here to submit testimony about the dire impact of COVID-19 on immigrant Student Learning and Academic Achievement. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our English Language Learners (ELLs), children of Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents, and adult immigrant learners have been consistently left behind. This public health crisis has underscored and exacerbated the existing inequities in New York City's public school system. ELLs continue to have the highest dropout rate (23%) of any subgroup in New York City, and only 19% of ELLs are proficient in math. Due to a lack of meaningful access to remote and blended learning and faulty communication, immigrant students

**New York Immigration Coalition**

131 W 33rd St. Fl 6  
New York, NY 10001  
212 627 2227  
nyic.org



have experienced significant gaps in their education. Therefore, we urge the City and the DOE make significant investments in immigrant families and implement the following recommendations (more information below):

1. **Urgently develop and implement a plan for catching up ELLs and students with Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents** that includes ELL summer school for students in K - 12th grade that fully incorporates students in K-2nd grade and ELLs with disabilities.
2. **Offer grants to Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and schools already well-positioned to support ELLs and immigrant families**, including for afterschool, Saturday programs, and family engagement
3. **Implement and fully fund the [Education Collaborative's Communications Plan](#)** to avoid sole reliance on online and email communication
4. **Restore and baseline \$12M for Adult Literacy Funding** so that thousands of immigrant and other adult learners do not lose their seats in English language programs across the City.

#### **Context:**

The NYIC's Education Collaborative convenes community leaders from across NYC's immigrant communities at the grassroots level, advocates, and practitioners. With over 30 years of experience reforming the state's educational system, we have a distinguished track record of improving English Language 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, undocumented/mixed status families, and LEP youth and adults. 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.

Education policy in NYC has historically marginalized ELLs, immigrant students, undocumented students, ELLs with disabilities, and LEP families. We should be disturbed by the fact that even before the pandemic only one-third of ELLs graduated on time compared to three-quarters of all students, despite the fact that ELLs have the potential to outperform native-English-speaking peers if given the right support. More tellingly, more than one in four ELLs students dropped out of school; the worst dropout rate of any





subgroup in the City. Additionally, even before the pandemic, LEP families struggled to receive timely communication and proper translation and interpretation services, from enrollment, to school-based communications, to special education and ELL services.

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored and compounded the profound inequities already affecting immigrant families and ELLs in our school system. Since the start of the pandemic, many immigrant families have struggled with illness, unemployment, food and housing insecurity, and the risk of not meeting their basic needs. Unfortunately, a drastic lack of appropriate communication and language access during the pandemic has left many LEP immigrant families struggling to understand processes and important notifications, such as requesting a device, returning to remote learning, applying for blended learning, receiving meals and other services, etc. Immigrant families have struggled to support their children's remote and/or blended schooling due to major gaps in culturally sustaining family engagement. Moreover, immigrant students are disproportionately being left behind academically due to the pandemic and school closures. A lack of adult literacy seats for parents and other adult learners has further exacerbated these issues.

#### **Recommendations:**

The NYC Department of Education (DOE) and City Council should allocate sufficient funding and resources to ensure that English Language Learners (ELLs) and students from immigrant families receive the extra support and services they need to catch up academically and get reintegrated into their school communities. To curb the negative impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on this population, City Council and the DOE must:

**Urgently develop and implement a plan for catching up ELLs and students with Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents** that includes ELL summer school for students in K - 12th grade that fully incorporates students in K-2nd grade and ELLs with disabilities.

Schools have admitted to our member organizations they are not providing the full set of ELL services students are legally entitled to, sharing issues such as: 1) ENL instruction is not yet in place due to COVID; 2) there is a lack of bilingual staff to offer pre-COVID services; 3) bilingual special education



services are not available during this time. Furthermore, we have found that due to the lack of state level enforcement, some newcomer ELLs are not even getting identified as needing ELL services.

- Families are deeply concerned their children have fallen behind and/or were already behind before the pandemic and that schools have no plan to catch them up. Meanwhile, last year's dire trends for ELLs, as seen in the achievement data (graduation/dropout rates, performance exams, etc) signify that a significant number of ELLs were already behind, to begin with.
- Families worry that their children have not received and/or are not receiving enough instruction and support. Many LEP families want(ed) to help their children learn remotely but are being left without support and resources for prolonged periods of time. Some CBOs/families report students who have been left without instruction for months. Many immigrant parents did not receive access to technology or instructional packets for weeks, and some have yet to receive these supports which are necessary for having a chance at engaging in remote learning.

In order to catch students up academically, the DOE must be equipped and committed to offer robust school supports, including an ELLs summer school inclusive of K-2nd grade. Moreover, to ensure the DOE can comprehensively repair the damages done since the start of the pandemic, they must clearly specify how they will monitor their academic support plan for these students and families. Therefore, public transparency is necessary from start to finish. Not only must the DOE publicly report data and metrics on a quarterly basis about the plan, from the start, but they must also identify criteria for the public to know when the DOE has or has not been successful, such as the number of students who are helped to get back in line towards a timely graduation.

**Offer grants to Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and schools already well-positioned to support ELLs and immigrant families, including for afterschool, Saturday programs, and family engagement.**

From the start of this health crisis, the city demonstrated that their public infrastructure and will to inform and engage immigrant families was insufficient in several areas. As an inevitable result, the DOE has been unable to adequately and sufficiently engage immigrant families. Since the DOE has largely relied on



schools to implement policies and communicate with families, immigrant families' experiences have been dependent on the infrastructure and level of care and available resources of their school communities. Many of the families who are most in need have had the greatest difficulties engaging with their school communities. Better strategies are desperately needed to get available resources and opportunities to LEP families.

- An alarming number of parents our members serve did not feel their child's school prepared them to help their children participate in remote learning or in summer school.
- Resources and information that is published or available for some is not getting to everyone.
- While the DOE has offered some immigrant-centered workshops, town halls, and family facing events to explain what is happening or how to best support their children, many parents are not able to access these events because they are not being communicated well, they are not announced with enough time, and/or are only offered virtually, missing parents who have low literacy and digital literacy levels.
- Families have not received tools directly from schools to support their children, and many schools expect families to reach out when they need help. However, immigrant families struggle to communicate with schools due to language barriers and the digital divide.

Immigrant serving Community Based Organizations and model schools have been filling the gaps that the DOE has been reluctant or unable to fill. Most of our member organizations have been stretching to support the added needs of immigrant families and students during this time. However, CBOs and schools have also been hit hard by the economic and social realities of COVID. Additional funding is necessary to potentially expand academic and family engagement services to those most in need. As a result, new funding streams should be expanded to include academic, family engagement and/or communication support for immigrant families. The following programs should be prioritized:

- ELL Afterschool
- ELL Saturday programs
- Extra enrichment supports for ELLs and students with LEP families
- Family engagement programs for immigrant families



**Implement and fully fund the [Education Collaborative's Communications Plan](#).**

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 translation and interpretation. 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. As a result, since March 2020, public schools have been relying on parents to be the primary educators and full-time caretakers of school-aged children, while largely communicating in languages they do not understand and/or in ways that are inaccessible to them. Immigrant and LEP families we serve have consistently been left in the dark about important updates and policy changes that directly impact their ability to help their children.

- The DOE has delayed publishing translations of announcements about major policy changes, including how to access basic services, how to get, setup or troubleshoot devices or WiFi, summer school, school closures, etc.
- The DOE has delayed translating announcements about major policy changes including notices about how to access devices/WiFi, summer school, busing, school closures, etc.
- Schools are not informing families about what services and supports are available for ELLs and students with disabilities.
- Communicating with schools has been difficult for many families, especially in schools where it is difficult to find someone who speaks their language.

Therefore, the DOE must drastically improve the educational experience of immigrant families by transforming the communications infrastructure and solve not only issues of communications during COVID but all communications with immigrant families going forward. NYC must create a long lasting approach that does not rely solely on online and written forms of communication. Moreover, the DOE should focus on forms of communication that are more accessible and easier to understand for LEP families and keep in mind families who speak Languages of Limited Proficiency and non-literate and/or non-digitally literate



families. Finally, the city and the DOE must consistently set aside and be able to tap into a significant budget to incorporate targeted face to face interactions and phone calls for hard to reach families in critical moments.

**Restore and baseline \$12M for Adult Literacy Funding so that thousands of immigrant and other adult learners do not lose their seats in English language programs across the city.**

The \$12 million in adult literacy funding supports over 7,500 adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (HSE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students in community-based adult literacy programs, CUNY campuses, and libraries across NYC. These programs are designed to help New Yorkers gain the literacy skills and credentials they need to successfully integrate into their communities and increase their employment and earnings potential. Many adult literacy programs have quickly and effectively pivoted to remote support for adult learners by altering group activities, providing information on the rapidly changing health situation, transforming programming to ensure that adult learners do not get lost, and supporting non-English speaking parents.

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, and has been increasingly critical as adult literacy programs have become a fundamental source of information for immigrant parents and adults to access resources to support their basic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

The New York Immigration Coalition thanks Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for this opportunity to testify. Immigrant families and their children are falling behind as our city races to respond to COVID-19 and its aftermath. We must ensure that our families are not left even further disadvantaged by a lack of support that will widen the gap of educational attainment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

*Submitted by:*

**Andrea Ortiz**

New York Immigration Coalition

aortiz@NYIC.org

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are approximately 2.2 million adults in New York City who lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma or both, of which over 75% are immigrants. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 3% of these 2.2 million adults are able to access basic education, high school equivalency, or English language classes in any given year. Many of these adults are also parents of young children; statewide, there are over 411,000 parents of young children who are limited English proficient, many of those here in NYC.



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

**Re: Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement**

**January 20, 2021**

Good afternoon. I am Maggie Moroff and I coordinate the ARISE Coalition, a group of several hundred parents, advocates, educators, and academics advocating for systemic changes to the day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities in our public schools. This past year, the many obstacles to instruction and achievement typically faced by our students have been magnified to unfathomable degrees.

We call your attention to four areas of particular importance for our students in this context.

- The need to considerably expand the literacy supports offered to students and to provide systematic, evidence-based core instruction and appropriate interventions to ensure all students learn to read – especially in light of the tremendous learning loss that’s taken place as a result of the pandemic.
- The import of developing true partnership with families – seeking on-going input in the development and inevitable modifications to the individual student special education plans the DOE is currently using known as Program and Related Services Adaptations Documents.
- The need to provide parents with real-time information about the supports and services their children receive pursuant to their IEPs. Parents need to know whether or not their children are now and continue to be offered those supports.

- Lastly, when it is safe for all children to return to school, the learning losses will be significant for all, and magnified for those with the greatest needs, including students with disabilities. ARISE members join the other voices here in calling for a well thought out, well-resourced plan to assess the academic and social-emotional damage done during Covid and to develop plans to address those for all students, including the over 200,000 students with disabilities in New York City. Such a plan must include the make-up instruction and services that students with disabilities have the legal right to receive.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about my testimony.



In response to COVID-19 school closures last spring, WNET/Thirteen, the city's public television station, quickly mobilized to produce two broadcast series for children.

[Let's Learn NYC!](#) was developed in partnership with the New York City Department of Education to supplement remote learning for children ages 3 to 8. Each episode engages viewers in fun learning activities focused on [literacy](#), [math](#), science, social studies, the arts, and more.



In June we premiered [CAMP TV](#), a fun, new broadcast series for kids ages 5-10 which aims to bolster student learning during the summer months. Hosted by [head counselor Zachary Noah Piser](#) (of Broadway's "Wicked," Dear Evan Hansen"), *Camp TV* features content from the city's best educational and cultural organizations.

Despite the best efforts of New York City teachers, data tells us the pandemic has set back learning for all students, but especially for students of color.

While Let's Learn and Camp TV were launched at the height of the pandemic to mitigate learning losses from school closures, the two series have also become [powerful tools](#) in providing equitable access to unique educational enrichment opportunities.

To date, Let's Learn and Camp TV have garnered nearly one million views, both on air and online. That's the equivalent of more than 30,000 classrooms full of students. Viewer feedback for both shows has been overwhelmingly positive:

*"I love the new programming. My son has difficulty with being still for long periods on a tablet. The TV programming does so much better for him. Kayden is very visual learning kid. Thank you."*

*"Thank you for this programming. I love that it's tailored for early childhood learners. I like that NYC educators are presenting the lessons, so it supports what my PreK has been learning. It's a great additional resource for parents. I also enjoy getting to see how other educators present topics that I teach also. I will continue to use this with my PreK class for distance learning."*





*"It is terrific. I feel that my daughter can watch it and not just be entertained but is fully engaged and participating. We have found ourselves continuing what was learned at other points of the day."*

*"I absolutely love this show. My 5-year-old is completely engaged, and did I mention it's a great show?"*

*"Our family agrees that Camp TV was awesome. We're truly sad it's over. Thank you to the Camp TV team for a job very*

*well done!"*

Let's Learn and Camp TV have received positive press coverage:

- Let's Learn was featured in a January 14 NBC News piece about teachers who are using TikTok and broadcast media to engage students during the pandemic. [Watch an excerpt.](#)
- [This New York Times article](#) features Valentin Vivar, a 5 yr old boy from Queens whose reading and writing has improved by watching Let's Learn.
- Camp TV was featured in the [New York Times' Aug 13, 2020 weekend roundup.](#)
- WNET surveyed families and received very positive feedback – 94% of respondents stated they learned something new from CAMP TV and 95% said they would like to see more episodes.



KIDS  
No S'mores, but Plenty of Fun



Zachary Noah Piser in "Camp TV," a PBS children's program that is free to stream at [camptv.org](http://camptv.org). PBS

WNET is making plans now to continue broadcasting Let's Learn and Camp TV during FY22, so that we can help make a difference for all children, like Valentin.



Testimony of Day Care Council of New York  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education  
Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair

Oversight: Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement.

January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Good Afternoon chair Treyger and members of the Committee on Education and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of the Day Care Council of New York. For more than 70 years, the Day Care Council has successfully served the needs of non-profit organizations sponsoring early childhood education programs across the five boroughs of New York City. Our 93 members currently operate more than 216 programs, most of which are under contract with the Department of Education.

As early childhood educators, Day Care Council members engage families at the crucial earliest stages of their child's development. The first years of a child's life are the only opportunity to provide them with the social-emotional development and early skills development that supports them throughout their education and throughout their lives. As such, Day Care Council and its network of community based early childhood educators have long recognized that access to strong and stable early childhood education programs has profound affects on students learning and academic achievements.

However, the rapid changes to program and funding models that effectively responding to COVID-19 requires is unprecedented. The pandemic continually increases the demands on community based early childhood education programs in responding to community needs at the same time that it presents meaningful threats to the stability and viability of many longstanding early childhood education providers.

Throughout the pandemic, Day Care Council members and other community based early childhood education providers have:

- **Launched Emergency Child Care Centers:** Community based organizations working with contracts through Department of Education 46 center-based Emergency Child Care

Center Based child care programs and 72 Family Child Care Emergency Child Care programs. The Emergency Child Care Centers operated similarly to the Regional Enrichment Centers in public school building serving the children 5 years and under of essential workers.

- **Developed Remote Programming Options:** Starting in March of 2020, early childhood education programs offered remote classes and engagement. This involved developing new ways to conduct classes online for very young children and providing support to families to help them support their children in accessing remote programming.
- **Opened 5 – Day Per Week Programs.** In September 2020, as public schools including public school Pre-K for All and 3-K for All programs opened using a hybrid model with the week divided between in person and remote education, CBO early childhood education programs operating with DOE contracts opened 5 day per week programs to meet the needs of working parents.
- **Opening Learning Bridges.** CBO's also opened Learning Bridges programs to provide child care during hybrid learning days to 3 and 4 year old children of essential workers.

Despite this innovative work and the recognition of child care workers as essential workers, New York City's child care system desperately needs increased investment in order to ensure that young children will have access to high quality early childhood education.

Early childhood education programs face instability and are struggling to keep their doors open. Many child care programs that are funded through private pay or through vouchers have already closed due to the financial instability of the pandemic. We expect to see the loss of more publicly funded programs in September as new procurements for DOE contracted child care programs go into effect.

A strong child care systems is crucial to ensuring that the COVID-19 pandemic does not hinder the next generation of students in New York City. In order to stabilize the child care sector Day Care Council of New York makes the following recommendations:

### **Continue to Pay the Full Value of Early Childhood Contracts Based on Capacity Not Enrollment**

Enrollment in ECE programs has been volatile through the pandemic and will likely continue to be so as necessary changes are made in how New York City's economy reopens. Parents who are currently working from home or unemployed due to the pandemic are waiting until further reopening to re-enroll their children.

Moreover, during the pandemic, Department of Education's Centralized Enrollment System has been experiencing significant backlogs leading to months long wait times for families who have applied for child care. Under the Centralized Enrollment System, parents must apply through Department of Education to enroll their child in a community based program even if that family

has a longstanding relationship with that provider such as having an older sibling already enrolled.

For these reasons, current enrollment does not reflect need. As workplaces reopen, parents need to be able to quickly obtain safe, affordable child care for their children. To fill this need, providers must be able to maintain their staff and infrastructure to facilitate a more comprehensive reopening as more parents return to work.

Therefore, Day Care Council urges New York City to maintain funding for contracted center based and Family Child Care programs at capacity throughout the pandemic.

### **Guarantee Equity in Access to Health and Safety**

The City must ensure that children, teachers and staff members in community based early childhood education programs have equal access to health and safety measures as their counterparts in public schools. This includes:

- Access to on-site nurses;
- Professional cleaning
- Training around health and safety protocols;
- Incentive pay for staff who put their own health at risk to keep programs open.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We greatly appreciate the City Council's work to support early childhood educators and welcome the opportunity for further collaboration. I can be reached for any question at [gbrender@dccnyinc.org](mailto:gbrender@dccnyinc.org).6

Testimony on Behalf of Democracy Prep Public Schools  
Successful Teaching Practices During the Pandemic

Committee on Education-Oversight - Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement.

Testimony by Princess Lyles,  
VP of External Affairs,  
Democracy Prep Public Schools  
plyles@democracyprep.org ,  
347-931-8120

Like the rest of the schools in the city, the sudden onset of school closures threw our school network into a situation we had never previously experienced. However, it has also given us a chance to reinforce successful systems that promote scholar achievement.

Across our schools, we have increased communication with families, made paper materials available for pick up, and provided technology and tech support to increase virtual engagement.

We are still committed to supporting scholars who need extra help to master skills. We use virtual learning for remediation, including small-group instruction. Every grade level has remediation built into their school schedule. This includes office hours, prescheduled tutoring, and creative supports for our scholars who receive speech and/or counseling services. Social-emotional learning is still a priority for our network. Our schools have virtual town halls (school-wide meetings) that build community. Now even family members are able to join!

We have also made a point of supporting our staff as they teach online. Teachers have received training from the network about how to teach well virtually. A crucial part of successful teaching is giving prompt feedback. We use online teaching platforms that allow progress monitoring. This means our teachers are looking at work in real time and giving immediate feedback. For example, our phonics instruction is going particularly well. All students have their cameras on so teachers can see their mouths moving.

Last, and perhaps most important, is constant feedback from families. At every turn, we solicit feedback and questions from families so that we can learn what is going well and where we should recalibrate.





Youth Changing the World  
One Documentary at a Time

**New York City Council  
Committee on Education Virtual Hearing  
"Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement"  
January 20, 2021**

**Testimony of Ambreen Qureshi  
Executive Director, Educational Video Center**

My name is Ambreen Qureshi and I am the Executive Director of EVC, the Educational Video Center. Thank you Chair Mark Treyger and members of the Committee on Education for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

**About EVC:**

Founded in 1984, the EVC is a youth media and social justice organization that teaches documentary filmmaking as a means to develop the artistic, critical literacy, and career skills of historically young people from low income communities, while nurturing their idealism and commitment to social change. EVC's vision is to build a society free from structural inequity where all young people are able to reach their full potential and position themselves as leaders to affect real and lasting change in their communities and the world. Over the last 35 years we have supported positive life and career paths for over 27,000 underserved youth, shared our proven media arts methodology with 15,000 practitioners, and trained over 1,100 teachers in our student-centered, culturally-responsive pedagogy. Our students' films have received over 130 film awards including 2 White House honors and an Emmy!

**Impact of COVID-19 on historical marginalized youth:**

- **Mental health strains.** Many of our youth are struggling under quarantine, from losing loved ones to COVID-19, to over-crowded public housing apartments full of extended family members who are unable to work, to immense economic pressures, and inadequate educational and social emotional supports during a very challenging time.
- **Increased digital divide.** To this day - ten months after the pandemic hit and schools closed - many of our youth still don't have access to technology or have inadequate access so they can't fully participate in remote learning and are falling behind in their education. This disproportionately impacts low-income youth of color.
- **Exacerbated inequity.** As high needs students, the youth we work with are especially vulnerable to falling through the cracks of the educational system at this time. They are dependent on our media education programs to receive credits towards graduation and/or paid stipends. If EVC is unable to provide programming our students will be at a higher risk of dropping out or aging out of school and not continuing on to college or careers that could change their lives and lift their families out of poverty.
- **Funding cuts.** Many critical youth programs and funding initiatives including SYEP, Learn to Work, CASA, Digital Inclusion and others have undergone serious budget cuts which have disproportionately impacted low-income youth of color. Often our students

are the sole breadwinners in their families and they rely on stipends for basic needs like food. The community, trusted relationships, social emotional learning support, and structure EVC provides are extremely critical for our students at this time and programs like ours need support

### **Recommendations and Demands:**

**Hear from our students directly**, and watch the following short films they have produced on the impact of COVID-19 on their education:

- *Connection Lost*: <https://vimeo.com/452629952> (pw: evcview)
- *Living with the Enemy: Media, Mental Health & Me*:  
<https://vimeo.com/426879900> (pw: evcview)
- *Quaranteens*: <https://vimeo.com/427463432> (pw: evcview)
- *Life under COVID-19*: <https://vimeo.com/499742536/edbb4626a3>
  - (This short film is part of a longer interactive documentary titled *The Pandemic from School to Prison: An Interactive Documentary*, which can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/NMAifilm>)

**Our students are demanding** systems to support at risk students who are struggling with a variety of systemic issues both online and in-person. Including lasting changes to promote racial justice within the educational system. Specific recommendations could include:

- Continuing food assistance programs
- Public option for taxpayer funded broadband internet for current NYC public school students and deepen tech distribution and support to ensure that students have the technology they need to succeed.
- Tax the richest New Yorkers and companies to fully fund our educational system and provide support for undocumented families and other workers who were otherwise excluded from government stimulus.
- Systems to support students after they graduate. Job/internship placement opportunities/public private partnerships. Current high school students will be graduating into a difficult economic climate with massive job losses and deep cuts to New York City's public higher education system. Fully funding CUNY programs and providing significant assistance to students in affording them will help them after they graduate.
- Culturally responsive/trauma and healing centered pedagogy moving forward. This pandemic is creating a mental health crisis for our young people. Moving out of it - we will need our educators to be understanding of the deep challenges that young people face and the support that they will need moving forward.
- Opportunities for youth to expand the reach of their social justice documentaries in their communities through school screenings, educational events, and having important youth-led dialogues. This will provide the critical connections needed during this time of increased isolation and trauma.



Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and we look forward to working with the City Council to ensure that all young New Yorkers, particularly historically marginalized youth from low-income communities, have access to services and support they need to thrive in their education and beyond.

## **TESTIMONY**

The Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Education

### Oversight – Impact of Covid-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement

January 20, 2021

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 especially 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 and who have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Remote learning has been particularly challenging for many of them.

We are now starting to see research<sup>1</sup> documenting the losses in academic achievement, and the increases in child mental health crises, that students have suffered since schools shut down in March 2020. The impact of COVID-19 has disproportionately affected students living in poverty, students of color, English language learners and students with disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Collaborative for Student Growth, "Learning During COVID-19: Initial findings on student's reading and math achievement and growth," Northwest Evaluation Association, November 2020, <https://www.nwea.org/research/publication/learning-during-covid-19-initial-findings-on-students-reading-and-math-achievement-and-growth/>. South Carolina Education Oversight Committee's Review of Remote "Learning's Impact on South Carolina's Students, Part 1" <https://bit.ly/39NcNjmf>; Center for Disease Control, "Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–October 17, 2020," *Weekly* / November 13, 2020 / 69(45);1675–1680, <https://bit.ly/2XWtQKm>; Center for Disease Control, "Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–October 17, 2020," *Weekly* / November 13, 2020 / 69(45);1675–1680 <https://bit.ly/2XWtQKm>

Our comments today will address four COVID-19 related issues, including bridging the technical divide, students' need for opportunities to access in person instruction along with continued remote learning options, the need for systems to mitigate of the long term impact of learning losses due to COVID-19, the disparate impact of COVID-19 on students with disabilities, and the need for an organized system for identifying and providing compensatory services to those students with disabilities who have not received mandated services.

### **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 16, 2020. Online learning and teaching can only be effective when students have learning devices (such as a computer or iPad) and consistent access to the internet.

Children who lacked devices or who were in temporary housing could not take advantage of the temporary free accounts offered by internet providers, 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. Moreover the initial offering of free internet access ended. In response to these issues, the DOE stepped up and obtained internet enabled iPads to provide access to students in need. However, the process has taken time. Of those students who now have

access, thousands waited many months to receive their device, a time when their education was reduced to picking up packets of worksheets at their schools.

Now, ten months after the New York City public schools shut down, the work of ensuring that all students have access to technology has still not been completed. There are impoverished students in New York City who are still waiting for devices, and also many students who live in city shelters that are located in cellular dead zones. For those students, the internet enabled iPads are an inadequate solution. Legal Aid filed a federal class action law suit, E.G. et al. v. The City of New York, in an attempt to compel the City to provide internet service for students residing in homeless shelters. The lawsuit is currently pending in the Southern District of New York, but still New York City has still failed to commit to providing internet access to children in homeless shelters before the summer of 2021.

### **Need for Increased Opportunities for In-Person Instruction and the Continuation of Remote Learning**

During the Summer of 2020 the New York City Department of Education introduced its hybrid plan for reopening schools, which consisted of some students receiving blended learning and some students remaining fully on remote instruction. Parents were promised that if they opted for remote learning, their students would be given opportunities to move to blended learning on a quarterly basis. That promise was not kept.

In October only 26% of students were receiving any amount of in person instruction.<sup>2</sup> In November, at the start of the winter flu season, parents were told that their decision regarding remote vs. blended learning would be binding for the remainder of the school year. Many parents understood that most children learn better in a classroom, but many chose remote instruction due to fear of the virus. Then on November 19, 2020, New York City schools closed again making the percentage of students receiving in person classes even smaller. Middle and high school students have still not returned for in person instruction. Consistent with the Chancellor and the Mayor's promise, families should have another opportunity to opt in to in person instruction before the end of the 2020 - 2021 school year.

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 to offer remote learning options.

Consistent with current findings noted previously, 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 under normal circumstances are only entitled to, at

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<sup>2</sup> Eliza Shapiro, "Only 26% of N.Y.C. Students Attend In-Person Classes, Far From Goal," New York Times, 10/26/20, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/nyregion/nyc-schools-attendance.html#:~:text=In%2Dperson%20and%20remote%20attendance,over%20the%20last%20few%20weeks>.

the most, one to two hours per day of schooling through the DOE's Office of Home 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.

### **Remediation of the Impact of COVID-19**

Students impacted by COVID-19 will need academic and social/emotional supports, particularly those who have been unable to receive in person instruction. Academic losses tend to compound over time. A May 2020 paper studying the impact of an earthquake in Pakistan found that although students missed only fourteen weeks of school, four years later they lagged 1.5 years behind in academic achievement.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the DOE must create a plan to mitigate the possibility of long term losses in academic achievement due to COVID-19. Tutoring, counseling, evidence based literacy programs, after school and Saturday programs should be developed and made available to all students who have suffered trauma or fallen behind academically in order to prevent greater long term learning losses.

### **Students with Disabilities**

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<sup>3</sup> Tahir Andrabi, Benjamin Daniels, and Jishnu Das, "Human Capital Accumulation after Disasters: Evidence from the Pakistan Earthquake of 2005," Research on Improving Systems of Education May 2020, [https://riseprogramme.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/RISE\\_WP-039\\_Adrabi\\_Daniels\\_Das.pdf](https://riseprogramme.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/RISE_WP-039_Adrabi_Daniels_Das.pdf).



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).

Although most teachers have returned to the classroom, inexplicably no school psychologists have returned to schools. Consequently, the Department of Education has been unable to complete new psycho-educational evaluations because these testing instruments are not normed for remote administration. From March through June of 2020, evaluations were not taking place at all. This created both delays in determining whether a student was eligible for special education services and what programs and services the student required.

As the DOE prepared to reopen schools in the fall, they issued guidance encouraging evaluators to eschew formal, standardized assessment tools, and instead base service decisions on a “comprehensive data driven model,”<sup>4</sup> which seems to consist of nothing more than socially distanced classroom observations and clinical interviews. According to the DOE guidance, in-person assessments will only take place “[i]f the school psychologist determines that face-to-face assessments... are necessary.”<sup>5</sup> This approach is likely to generate subjective, superficial assessments that are neither norm-referenced nor criterion referenced. The risk of missing or misdiagnosing a student’s disability is unacceptably high. The DOE needs to immediately create safe systems for administering in-person standardized assessments so that they can accurately and efficiently ensure that students are getting the services they require.

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/learning/special-education/special-education-in-blended-and-remote-settings>.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

## **A System for Providing Compensatory Services to Students with Disabilities**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of students with disabilities have not received the special education supports and services that are required by their Individualized Education Programs. Thousands more may have been offered the services, but due to the nature of their disability, were unable to participate in or benefit from the remote format. These students have lost significant ground during the past ten months. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), they are entitled to compensatory services to make up for what they should have received.

Each and every student who is entitled to compensatory services could, in theory, file for an impartial hearing to request individual relief. As this Committee well knows, however, the NYC Impartial Hearing Office is already overwhelmed by cases and is experiencing a significant back-log. Funneling thousands of additional hearing requests into an already overburdened system will not provide families with efficient or effective relief. A class action law suit has been filed in federal court, demanding that the City and State develop a plan for providing compensatory services to students with disabilities in New York City. We therefore encourage the DOE to move quickly to develop a city-wide system to provide make-up services to all students with disabilities who have experienced learning loss or who have not received the full complement of services required by their IEPs during the pandemic. Several other states have already created such

systems.<sup>6</sup> New York City must follow suit, or risk a deluge of impartial hearing requests that will completely overwhelm the Hearing Office.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and welcome any questions that City Council may have.

Contacts: Cara Chambers  
Director  
Education Advocacy Project  
The Legal Aid Society  
Juvenile and Civil Practices  
[cachambers@legal-aid.org](mailto:cachambers@legal-aid.org)  
212-577-3342

Melinda Andra  
Assistant Supervising Attorney  
Education Advocacy Project  
The Legal Aid Society  
Juvenile Rights Practice  
[mandra@legal-aid.org](mailto:mandra@legal-aid.org)  
212-312-2319

Susan Horwitz  
Supervising Attorney, Education Law Project  
The Legal Aid Society  
Civil Practice  
[shorwitz@legal-aid.org](mailto:shorwitz@legal-aid.org)  
212-426-3061

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., plans for Pennsylvania (<https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Special%20Education/FAQContact/Pages/COVID-19-Compensatory-Services.aspx>) and Ohio (<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Reset-and-Restart/Students-with-Disabilities>)

**New York City Council Committee on Education Hearing  
Testimony Submitted by Student Leadership Network  
January 20, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Robert Robinson, and I am the Senior Managing Director of CollegeBound Initiative (CBI) at Student Leadership Network, formerly known as Young Women's Leadership Network. As a Brooklyn native and proud New York City public school alumnus, I began my career as the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at my alma mater, New York University (NYU). I worked specifically with their Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) to increase enrollment for students from underserved communities. Following my time at NYU, I joined CBI as a Director of College Counseling at Middle College High School at Medgar Evers College. I also served as a Director of College Counseling at Juan Morel Campos Secondary School before joining Student Leadership Network's central office team in 2008. On behalf of Student Leadership Network, thank you to Chair Mark Treyger and all of the members of the Education Committee for this opportunity to testify about the impact of COVID-19 on student learning and academic achievement on behalf of our 25 partner schools in New York City.

Student Leadership Network operates two programs in New York City that support a diverse pipeline of young people from underserved communities to gain access to educational opportunities that help prepare them to lead successful lives: The Young Women's Leadership Schools (TYWLS), a high-performing network of all-girls' traditional district public schools, and CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), a comprehensive college access, persistence, and success program for young people of any gender.

In 1996, Ann and Andrew Tisch partnered with the Center for Educational Innovation and the New York City Department of Education to launch The Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS) of East Harlem, the first public all-girls school to open in the United States in 30 years. Their vision was to provide girls growing up in underserved communities with a high-quality college preparatory education modeled after the finest private schools. Today, Student Leadership Network impacts more than 2,500 students through our five all-girls' public schools in New York City and nearly 8,000 through our 15 national TYWLS affiliate schools.

In 2001, with a vision for making the dream of college a reality for students from underserved communities and first-generation college students, Student Leadership Network launched the co-educational CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), first to support TYWLS of East Harlem's inaugural graduating class. Today nearly 14,000 students in 25 New York City public schools are impacted by CBI, which places full-time college counselors in schools who, just as in the best private schools, do it all. CBI's Directors of College Counseling support *all* students with college selection, test preparation, financial aid, scholarship resources, applications, essays, interviews, college tours, and so much more. CBI's Director of College Counseling create a college-going culture across their schools, working with students and their families as early as the sixth grade. Since 2001, CBI has helped more than 18,000 students enroll in college and has secured more than \$736 million total in financial aid awards, excluding loans. On average, 94% of graduates of our partner schools are accepted to college, and 89% of students accepted

have directly enrolled in college. This is well above the City's average college enrollment rate, which was 62.8% for this most recent graduating class of 2020.

When our partner schools closed in March 2020, our students lost daily structure, stability, and in-person college readiness programming. Many students have had to take on additional roles to support their families due to the devastating and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on our school communities. Depression, anxiety, and trauma have arisen as essential mental health needs for our students, and morale and burnout have been challenges faced by school faculty and staff. Connectivity challenges impact student learning and academic achievement, with many students lacking proper learning devices and adequate internet connectivity. Building relationships with students virtually has also been a challenge, and beginning the school year without having the opportunity to meet many students in person has contributed to difficulty reaching and engaging students virtually. In many ways, our partner schools provided a sense of security for students that is not easily replicated virtually. All of these factors are impacting our students' learning and academic achievement during the COVID-19 crisis.

To meet our students' urgent education and college access needs during this unprecedented time, Student Leadership Network continues our college access programming virtually via online college counseling and programming; liaising between students and college admissions offices for acceptance, financial aid, and enrollment conversations; and preparing juniors to complete the necessary steps to be ready to apply to college in the fall. The class of 2020 received increased advisement this summer through our virtual Bridge to College and alumni engagement programs to support their matriculation to college in the fall. The class of 2021 benefitted from our first-ever virtual CollegeBound Summer Institute, which familiarized students with the college application process and supported them with their application components. Our charge is even more urgent now that there is so much uncertainty facing our students and their families, who are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Student Leadership Network's programming would not be possible without our strong and exemplary partnerships with the New York City Department of Education and the New York City Council. We sincerely appreciate the New York City Council's investment in Student Leadership Network's The Young Women's Leadership Schools (TYWLS) and CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), and look forward to continuing to partner with both the Council and the Department of Education to ensure that all students have the resources that will propel them to achieve their dreams.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.





City Council Education Committee Hearing – 20 January 2021

Testimony by Mam Fatou Dukuray, youth organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol

My name is Mam Fatou and I'm sharing on behalf of youth at the Brotherhood/Sister Sol.

There is little understanding of just how stressful virtual learning in a pandemic is because no one has experienced this before – no one but us. I'm here to say that students' mental health is being negatively impacted like never before and failure to resolve this puts us in further danger.

City Council members must advocate on behalf of students and increase the budget for student supports.

As a senior, I have been shamed by teachers when I ask for additional support and I have less access to individualized support than I really need. As my grades suffer, my parents become more disappointed and I feel as though my college acceptances are in danger. I am further disserved when I am unable to access private tutors and days previously scheduled to make up work are canceled preventing me from improving my grades. Moreover, students like me who previously had extra time for exams are not being granted this and it is leading many of us to randomly fill out answers to finish by the allotted time – especially when multiple tests are given in one day.

We aren't robots and our schools neglect neurodivergent students and students with different types of learning and with disabilities.

To better our schools, we need great teachers and smaller classrooms. We also need to stop student testing, fund tutors and mental health support and to hire more counselors, therapists, and student support staff to help all students, especially those of us falling behind and struggling both mentally and emotionally.

Thank you for listening to me; please do more than just hear me.

For more information regarding our campaign and the interactive exhibit, please contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles ([mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org](mailto:mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org), 212.283.7044).



City Council Public Safety Committee Hearing – 20 January 2021

Testimony by Wilhemina Amoah a youth organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol

My name is Wilhemina Amoah and I am a youth organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol.

To address issues worsened by COVID-19, we have to find money to create meaningful shifts in our education system and, instead, create pathways to student success. This will require police free schools. Failure to divest from school police and invest in student success will mean that our city continues to fail us youth. Today, New York City is far from where it need be to ensure student success as our schools face troubling realities:

- School segregation leads to chronic underfunding of schools in New York state which has negative and disparate impacts for Black, Latinx and low-income students given subsequent resource disparity.<sup>[iii]</sup>
- Only 77.3% of the 1.1 million children in the DOE system will graduate on time and only 55% of NYC high school graduates will graduate college-ready.<sup>[iii] [iv]</sup>
- 1 in ten NYC public school students is houseless.<sup>[v]</sup>

Additionally, in a nation in which 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker<sup>[vi]</sup>, New York City has more school safety agents (SSAs) than any other school district in the U.S. The presence of police in our schools has disproportionately impacted students who are low-income, Black, and Latinx, who are more likely to be the subject of exclusionary discipline and police response at school than their white peers.

Everyone in the City Council, however, has the power to shift this – beginning with meaningfully shifting funds from the police, reforming their responsibilities, and reinvesting in our communities.

We must deconstruct the school-to-prison pipeline; end Broken Windows policing; and truly decriminalize low-level offenses that lead to our youth having negative contact with the state and carceral systems. And, we must do this now.

Our vision for education in New York City includes safe, restorative, healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must pursue policies that value and respect the dignity of students, caregivers, and their communities. This requires providing schools equitable resources, adopting a culturally responsive curriculum, preventing trauma, repairing harm, and promoting restorative practices.

*For more information regarding our campaign, please contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles (mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org, 212.283.7044).*

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[i] New York City Council, School Diversity in NYC. 2019, <https://council.nyc.gov/data/school-diversity-in-nyc/#:~:text=However%2C%20New%20York%20City%20public,more%20than%2050%25%20white%20students.>

[ii] Alliance for Quality Education, Chronic Underfunding. 2018, <https://www.aqeny.org/2018/09/11/report-new-yorks-chronic-underfunding-of-schools-the-disparate-impact-on-black-latino-students/>

[iii] NYC's 2019 Graduation Rate Inches Up to 77% . January 16, 2020, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/1/16/21121757/nyc-s-2019-graduation-rate-inches-up-to-77>

[iv] More NYC High School Students are College-Bound – and ‘College Ready’. November 21, 2019, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2019/11/21/21121750/more-nyc-high-school-graduates-are-college-bound-and-college-ready>

iv] The Children in the Shadows: New York City's Homeless Students. September 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/09/magazine/homeless-students.html>

[vi] ACLU, Counselors and No Cops: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>





City Council Education Committee Hearing – 20 January 2021

Testimony by Tida Dukuray, youth organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol

My name is Tida Dukuray and I am a youth organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol and a senior at Democracy Prep Harlem High School. Students like me are stressed and exhausted over the college application process, school projects, homework and other extracurricular activities. Teachers are giving us more work and shorter deadlines to complete assignments since COVID started.

I'm currently taking three AP classes – Biology, English, and Calculus, and a college Sociology prep course. These classes require a lot of reading, note taking, and studying. Good grades require time and additional help from teachers but now technology gets in the way and my teachers are harder to find.

When a website crashes I cannot complete assignments; when teachers change the format of a website, I cannot see past assignments to use to study for future tests; when I am having technology or internet issues, I am barely able to participate and learn.

Considering COVID, some solutions that can be implemented to lessen the pressure on students include ensuring that students who need assistance get it in a way that they need; assigning less homework because we are already teaching ourselves and now we're working twice as much with less time given household responsibilities; requiring teachers to have longer office hours with space for more students; adjust the graduation requirements for seniors like me which includes removing Regents requirements because we could not take them.

We are all struggling to survive and the pandemic has made it more difficult. There needs to be realistic and healthy expectations of students so that the cost we pay for graduating after spending our entire school year learning remotely wouldn't affect us.

For more information regarding our campaign and the interactive exhibit, please contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles (mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org, 212.283.7044).



City Council Education Committee Hearing – 20 January 2021

Testimony by John Paul Infante of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol

My name is John Paul Infante and I am a Liberation Program Facilitator and organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol.

As a former New York City public school student and high school teacher, I've experienced the inequities of the public education system long before COVID-19. The burden Black and Brown students, their families, teachers and school administrators have been forced to endure because of poor responses by superintendents and school districts is par for the course. The reality of Black and Brown students and teachers of color face in the classroom is rarely, if ever, considered when decisions are made.

The process of entering school should not resemble the process of entering a prison. Policing Black and Brown children is criminal. Before COVID-19, Black and Brown public school students were policed – stopped and frisked by school safety officers if the change in their pocket sets off the metal detectors on their way to first period. Before COVID, while many Black and Brown public school students were being suspended and expelled, their white counterparts in specialized and private schools were treated with the gentleness youth deserve.

Creating a safe, restorative and healing environment for all New York City public students, means police-free schools that prioritizes healing led by educators centering trauma informed approaches and culturally responsive education armed with an equitable distribution of technological resources to all students and translation for all families.

More student support staff will make it so that educators of color can teach while professionals address their students' traumas and recognize unsafe home environments. Every child is entitled to a free and appropriate public education that centers their experience, and it is the responsibility of the world's wealthiest city that they have access to computers, wifi, and any other resources – including food – in order to ensure this. Anything less is a crime.

For more information regarding our campaign, please contact me at: [jp@brotherhood-sistersol.org](mailto:jp@brotherhood-sistersol.org), 212.283.7044



**KIPP: ALL Middle School**

**Valerie Márquez Edwards, Founding Middle School English Language Arts Teacher & Advocacy Advisor**

**Testimony Presented to the New York City Council Education Committee**

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

**Wednesday, January 20, 2020**

My name is Valerie Márquez Edwards. I am a founding middle school English teacher and Advocacy Advisor at KIPP: ALL Middle School in the Bronx's District 15. Our school educates 247 New York City middle-schoolers, and I teach English to 85 of them.

As a teacher and advocate, I am committed to ensuring that all children and teachers in New York City, not just those within my public charter school community, receive equitable access to a safe learning environment. In the context of this global pandemic, a safe learning environment means providing all children, their families, and their teachers with a physical space to learn in which the spread, or lingering threat of COVID-19 exposure, and all the tribulations that comes with that, is eradicated to the best of our science and ability.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, I have lauded KIPP: NYC for ensuring that all families whom we serve have access to food and technology necessary for remote learning. Alongside us, the City has done well to ensure that a testing and tracing protocol be implemented in its public schools; however, a disparity between access in district schools versus access in public charter schools still exists.

I would like to underscore that charter school students are public school students, and as such, implore the City Council to include KIPP: NYC, the children and families whom we serve, and the teachers and staff whom we employ, in the robust testing and tracing efforts afforded to children and staff in DOE school buildings.

Over the months of teaching and working remotely, I have become aware that many of my students and some of my colleagues suffer from pre-existing conditions that discourage them from feeling safe returning to school buildings. Ubiquitously, scientists and lawmakers alike agree that a more robust testing and tracing protocol must be implemented to ensure a safe reopening. In fact, Mayor De Blasio has stated "I guarantee you that plan[ing] will be an even heavier emphasis on testing and therefore want to say to everyone in the school communities...[w]hen we reopen, everyone who comes into that building, all of those kids have to have a testing consent on file. Testing is going to become more of the norm" and I am here to hold our mayor and our city accountable for that.



A growing body of scientific evidence from around the globe, particularly in Europe, where countries like Germany and France were able to keep their schools safely open with staff, student, and parent testing protocols, supports De Blasio's insistence on testing in our public schools as a necessary action for ensuring health and safety in our community. With this in mind, I am inclined to ask: Why has City Hall failed to include charter schools in New York City's testing and tracing program?

My opinion is in line with that of the epidemiologists, teachers' unions, the New York City Charter School Center, and Mayor De Blasio: to reopen safely, we need widespread and equitable access to free testing at all of our public charter school sites. Without testing for charter school students and staff, our City falls short of the fiduciary duty it has proclaimed to all its stakeholders, including the children I teach every day and staff I work alongside, during this unprecedented health crises.

I appreciate your time and consideration, and in conclusion, urge the City Council to enact and enforce basic and equitable public health practices that protect my students, their families, and our communities from further devastation.

Thank you.



January 20, 2021

New York City Council Committee on Education  
New York City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Members:

My name is Jason Botel, and I am Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at Catapult Learning. Prior to joining Catapult Learning, I was Acting Asst. Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education.

In partnership with the New York City Department of Education, Catapult Learning has been delivering Title I services to thousands of students for several years, and we've been doing this kind of work across the country with students from low-income communities and students with disabilities for more than 40 years.

Most of the work we do in New York and across the country involves recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting teachers to provide small-group academic intervention, both in-person and virtually, to help students catch up in both reading and math. We also provide counseling and work with families to help ensure students make the academic progress they need to succeed as they progress toward higher education and the workforce.

We recognize that because of COVID-19 and the disruptions it has caused to children's education and families' economic and physical well-being, the population of students in need of intervention and remediation is much larger than in a typical year. In particular, many students with disabilities are in dire need of COVID Recovery services. For many years we have partnered with school districts across the country to deliver instruction and behavior support services to students with disabilities. Last summer we were engaged by another large urban district to run their Extended School Year program, and we are currently partnering with that same district to launch COVID-19 compensatory services for students with disabilities. We hope to have the opportunity to similarly help New York City meet the needs of students with disabilities.

As you know, through the Consolidated Appropriations Act enacted on December 27, Congress is sending to NYC and districts across the country billions of dollars in emergency education relief. This funding will likely provide New York City with more than \$2 billion in Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief. In addition, the law provides Governor Cuomo with an Emergency Education Relief fund of more than \$322 million, much of which is likely to flow to schools in New York City. With all this funding, New York City has an opportunity to stand up a robust system of Education Recovery services

# Catapult Learning

to combat COVID-related learning loss, especially among students from low-income households and students with disabilities, and Catapult Learning looks forward to being a key partner in that work. City Council, the Mayor's Office, and the DOE can all play a role in making sure these resources are used most effectively. Catapult Learning stands ready to help in any way we can.

One last point – even in the midst of the pandemic, we think it's important to attend to the legal and moral mandate to ensure that children of color are not being disproportionately referred for special education and that children of color and children with disabilities are not being disproportionately suspended or expelled. We are helping other school districts with this crucial challenge, and we welcome the opportunity to help New York City with it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jason Botel  
Vice President, Strategic Partnerships

**New York City Councils Committee Oversight Hearing on  
The Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement**  
January 20, 2021

We would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Education for holding this important oversight hearing on the impact of COVID-19 on student learning and academic achievement. My name is Lori Podvesker, and I am the Director of Policy at INCLUDEnyc. For nearly 40 years, INCLUDEnyc (formerly Resources for Children with Special Needs) has helped NYC families navigate the complex special education service and support systems.

While we commend the Mayor and Chancellor for their efforts to educate our 1.1 million children these last ten months, we testify today with great urgency for City Hall to prioritize right now the delivery and quality of education for nearly 300,000 students with disabilities ages 3-21 in New York City. Students with disabilities are not making adequate educational progress; each and every day the city is failing to meet their needs.

During last Spring when New York City quickly became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New York City school system was quickly and radically disrupted. Schools, teachers, and students faced significant barriers as we pivoted to full time remote instruction. While some obstacles were outside of the city's control, many were not, and sadly are still obstructing teaching and learning almost a year later.

More than a hundred thousand school professionals did not have the requisite skills nor access to evidence-based tools to effectively provide online instruction and special education services. As a result, very little, if any, specialized instruction was delivered throughout the city last Spring and Summer. This created additional learning barriers for students with disabilities in a system that was already failing our students. And the same issues still persist in too many of our schools and classrooms.

Student learning can not occur if:

- Appropriate instruction is not delivered or can not be accessed
- Students with disabilities do not receive any or all their related services and individualized support
- The City and schools do not provide families with consistent, clear and timely information
- Students do not have consistent access to broadband, devices, or an environment that is supportive for learning
- Students on remote instruction in need of full time support can not access a formally trained adult to help support and teach them at home

Measuring the academic achievement of students with disabilities and teachers on their efficacy and impact in typical times is hard; the pandemic has made it nearly impossible for schools to do so. Tools for formally measuring achievement such as standardized tests and alternative assessments have been temporarily suspended by the City, State, and the U.S. Department of Education. Other

formal tools traditionally used to specifically measure the progress of individual students receiving special education services such as goals on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are moot. Most students' IEPs no longer reflect their present levels of performance and therefore, their goals are no longer appropriate. In addition, the quality of informal assessments conducted by teachers has been compromised as the result of online learning and all its associated challenges.

We cannot measure the impact of COVID-19 on student learning and academic achievement if we do not have data, nor the required infrastructure to capture it. We need data that helps us understand the extent to which the overall well being of students affects their learning so that the City can use it to better target support for students, teachers, and schools in need.

As a result of these persistent special education issues, we recommend that the Department of Education and City:

- Develop a citywide plan to adequately address compensatory services by June 30, 2021
- Disseminate guidance documents for schools on the implementation of their citywide compensatory plan by August 30, 2021
- Reevaluate every student with an IEP by December 31, 2021, in addition to their annual review of IEP
- Create borough-based centers for on-site evaluations and related services
- Publish school-based data four times a year on the timeliness and delivery of special education evaluations and all IEP-mandated special education services and supports
- Create an accountability mechanism that measures social emotional instruction and learning
- Reorganize school psychologists so each District 75 organization has their own
- Provide parents with more support and training on: specially designed instruction and online learning, behavior supports, digital literacy, educational rights

Without the City taking immediate action, we fear the implications will be drastic. This generation of NYC students with disabilities are unjustly struggling and will continue to be for the long-term, resulting in inadequate literacy skills, unemployment, behavioral challenges, and the inability to appropriately socialize.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these important matters. We look forward to partnering with you to improve equity and access for all students with disabilities in New York City.

Respectfully submitted,



Lori Podvesker  
Director of Disability and Education Policy



*Hello members of the City of New York, Council Committee on Education, My name is Aletty A. Portalatin. I am in the 6th grade of Bedford Stuyvesant New Beginnings Charter School and I am 11 years old. I am a member of our schools Student Government Association. In SGA we provide a place where students are not judged and an area you can be you. We also feel safe and we can express our feelings. I would like to focus on the emotional impact COVID - 19 has had on my learning and academic achievement.*

*If I am frank, the impact of COVID - 19 has been very heavy. You might wonder how my online learning has impacted my academic success. Well, I don't like it as much as I would if it were going into the school building. With my homework, I get really overwhelmed and I don't always get my class assignments right. But the toughest thing is when I have to deal with things out of my control like "lag out". Wifi isn't the easiest for me, so I don't really have the option to rewind what I miss or if I forget anything due to lag.*

*I feel like I can do my school work right, if we get more time for homework and class assignments. Maybe other children feel the same way. Now that we are remote, some teachers are not in New York and have different time zones and that affects the child's work if the teacher is not ready. Not all children have access to technology and wifi. Not all families can afford the right technology. Not all schools provide enough technology to continue online learning. Most schools provided the technology on a "first come first served" basis. Should access to education be equal for all children? I think it should be equal because children represent themselves, families, community, nation and the world!*

*I definitely know that not all children enjoy remote learning because it causes us lots of emotional issues such as depression, stress, anxiety, and more. COVID-19 usually offered everybody a position to panic. Remote learning creates much less wasted time, there are no distractions from other students who are not focused on their work, no bullies, and no long bus or train commute. Us children do miss seeing our friends very much, but that is more due to the pandemic than virtual school. I've realized not all children can focus on remote learning, but let's have an even opinion slice, plenty are doing fine. And not only can some children not focus but some other children are deeply emotionally affected. On remote learning the work tends to be confusing for some of us children.*

*Thank you members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for your time and consideration. I hope you can understand the COVID -19 problem and my position as a student during online learning. I hope you remain safe, and thank you again for hearing me out.*

*Sincerely,  
Aletty A. Portalatin  
BSNBCS, Class of 2023*

## City Council Written Testimony

January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Christina Reyes, CEO

Inwood Academy for Leadership Charter School

Inwood Academy is a 5 – 12 charter school in Inwood, the upper most part of Manhattan. We serve 950 students from the Inwood, Washington Heights, and Fordham section of the Bronx. We have been operational since August 2010. 24% of our student population are current or former English Language Learners and 24% of our population are currently Students with Disabilities.

Inwood Academy has worked together as a school community to combat the pandemic by supporting our families and staff to provide the best possible education during this time.

The very first thing we ensured is the safety of our families. During the first two weeks of March school leadership monitored the situation closely and prepared staff in a very basic way by telling them to create google classrooms for every subject and class that they taught and to enroll and get students to accept these classrooms. We didn't know what a big deal this would be but it proved to be extremely helpful just two weeks later.

We chose to close school on March 16th. Our parent teacher conferences were held remotely for the first time ever on this day. On March 19th and 20th staff returned to the building to participate in professional development surrounding the switch to remote schooling. As this was so new to many, our teachers shared with each other the tools they have used in the past to support the various forms of online learning they had seen be used successfully.

The first two goals of Inwood Academy during the initial stage of remote learning were to

1. ensure the safety of our families - to make sure they had their basic needs in the form of groceries and technology. All students received a Chromebook by the middle of May. We helped families get signed up for free wifi during the time that this was being offered. Later when this ended we began handing out hotspots to families.

2. Communicate consistently. School leadership made communication a priority - amongst staff and families. The leadership team met daily to review needs and keep each other up to date with every department and work to resolve concerns as they arose. Families received constant communication from our student support team about student schedules, lack of completion of student work and to find out any concerns or needs of our families

Once we had established these two priorities we worked consistently to improve the academics of our remote experience. We have eased students and staff into a nearly fully synchronous instructional model with some elective courses still having some classes being completed asynchronously. The academic teams have adopted Nearpod, Flipgrid and other resources to deliver the best possible remote instruction to students.

The entire summer was spent planning for our return in the Fall. Several factors led to the

school choosing a remote only option for instruction. The school surveyed staff and students and results showed that many staff would qualify for medical exemptions and that many families (around 50%) would opt for remote instruction. In addition, the city denied COVID19 testing to charter schools. A lack of regular COVID19 testing was cited as a reason both staff and families would feel unsafe to enter the building. The school was able to provide a five-day Family Support Center (FSC) to support families who could not or did not want to leave their children at home or preferred to have their children learning in a school building. Close to 100 students came to school every day. They were put into pods and were assigned two staff members per pod. The pod leaders kept students focused on their classes and ensured they finished their assignments. They also took them outside for walks or to the park to get fresh air and move their bodies. Over time, the FSC became an intervention strategy for students who were not signing into classes or were missing large numbers of assignments. Parents began to trust this on-site resource.

While we had to close the FSC when rates began to rise in mid-November, the school is now working on a plan to reopen it soon.

Since March 2020, we have given out meals to our families and in partnership with World Vision, been able to do several food drives to provide necessary groceries to our families and the greater community. Most recently, we partnered with World Vision for a holiday gift giveaway. We continue to provide loaner Chromebooks for those whose CBs have broken as well as continued to provide hotspots for families who need it.

Now as we enter this stage of vaccination roll out we plan on partnering with our local elected officials and other community partners to create an informational campaign about the benefits of the vaccine and hopefully dispel some of the misinformation that has been spread about it. We believe the vaccine is our best weapon against COVID-19 and we hope that vaccine sites will continue to expand uptown as currently there are very limited sites as compared to the Bronx and Brooklyn.

While each stage has been hard as decisions had to be made with little to no information, the school is cautiously optimistic about the next stage. We will continue to serve the families of Uptown and the Bronx and support them through this difficult time. We know the ripple effects of this pandemic will be felt for many years and our message is, we are here.

Dear Members of the New York City Council Education Committee,

I am the parent of a Brooklyn Prospect Charter School student. I am writing to request that City Council support the inclusion of ALL public school children, including those in NYC charter schools, in DOE's robust randomized testing program and that all teachers be included in any teacher-focused vaccination program

Because of concerns around teacher, staff, and student safety, our elementary school has not yet fully reopened. This has been so hard on many of the students and families in our community. Like so many parents around the City, we are struggling with balancing the desire for our children to learn in person with concerns about safety in the middle of this pandemic.

DOE's testing program has been widely praised by public health professionals as an important component in keeping Covid transmission in check in schools and throughout the community. We ask that charter schools be included in this program – our students, and our dedicated teachers and staff are equally at risk as those in DOE schools. We have no separate resources to fund standalone testing programs and our children have had to wait for many months longer than their DOE peers to be able to re-enter their classrooms.

Further we are appalled to hear that certain public school teachers, those who opted not to join the union, would be excluded from vaccination programs organized to quickly focus on classroom educators. We ask you to insist that public charter school teachers be invited to join those focused vaccination efforts.

Our school's student population hails from all over Brooklyn, and our teachers and staff from all over the City. Many of us have pre-existing conditions, or live in households with people particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. Extending the program to us would keep not only our students, staff, and teachers safer, but would also keep the communities our kids would go home to safer as well.

Thank you for your consideration,

Elizabeth Zeldin

Jan 20, 2021

New York City Council  
Committee on Education  
Oversight - Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair and Members

Covid-19 has brought New York City to a standstill at an immense cost to our education system. Families with school-age children are affected by household responsibilities, exacerbated by school closures. Amid this outlook, charter school arises as an oasis in NYC public education. I have 2 kids, and I'm fortunate they attend Success Academy Charter Schools. Back in March 2020, when the DOE was debating over keeping schools open, Success Academy was the first to go remote. Since then, rather than extend the uncertainty, Success announced remote learning through at least March 2021.

Even though public charter schools already receive less funding than district schools, Success Academy has equipped all 20,000 students with either Chrome tablets or Chromebooks with all the necessary apps for a fully digital experience. They use Kami to do written math work and all classroom libraries are available through Tumblebooks or Amazon Audiobooks. My children have a full schedule of live instruction 5 days a week, all day. They have the same teachers and the same small section of students. They receive chess and debate as talent electives. They have online class trips like the Big Apple Circus virtual performances and they also have optional free, virtual after-school programming with fun courses like Arts and Code.

The quality of teachers and staff has been preserved. They work hard to maintain academic integrity. With GoGuardian they're able to see what scholars are doing and help them maintain focus. I can keep track of my children's' performance through Google Classrooms and PupilPath and staff are in constant communication through ParentSquare.

Families are reasonably concerned about children, not only falling behind academically but also about the consequences of protracted separation from others. While the social gains being on campus are hard to replicate, high-performing charter networks such as Success Academy, have managed to create an exemplary virtual program that other schools can start to learn from.

Sincerely,

Edwin Cespedes  
Charter School Parent

Thank you for hearing my testimony about learning during Covid.

I want to say that the principal of New Voices has done an amazing job guiding the school through the pandemic. He had a plan in place to open the school safely and had another plan in place for a smooth transition back to full-time remote when the Mayor made that call. The school is doing an excellent job of making sure the kids show up to their Zoom classes, that they're accountable and that they're doing real work. I think my daughter is learning as much and as well as she can be this year.

But that is a long way from saying she is learning as well and as much as she should be this year. The kids taking Living Environment have missed all of their lab hours this year. I'm sure they'll be allowed to pass the class anyway, but the lab hours are important enough to warrant their own separate grade so this is a dimension to the class that is sorely lacking. If I were a student interested in biology, medicine or environmental science I'd feel really gypped. My daughter is in a two-year STEM program. The classroom full of power tools, 3-D printers, Sphero robots, Little Bits circuitry kits and so much more is sitting unused while the kids do month after month of coding, and CAD projects that they can't actually build or print. It's such a waste. All that's left are Zoom classes that are a shadow of what middle school classes should be, and homework. The work load is lighter, the teachers are moving more slowly than they could in the classroom and the kids will probably do 75% to 80% of the material they should cover this year, maybe more in math because that's fairly well defined. in Living Environment it's probably less because the kids don't get to learn by doing at all.

Moreover my daughter, who has been an enthusiastic student for years, routinely tells me she hates school, which breaks my heart. She hates it because all the fun, enriching, collaborative, social and hands-on parts of school have been stripped from it. And I really don't understand why this has to be the case.

Parents have not been given a succinct and clear reason why middle and high schools are closed. I honestly don't know why my kid can't be in her building at least part time. Many middle schools share their building with elementary schools (including my daughter's). So why is it safe and viable for 5-to-10-year-olds to be there but not 11-to-13-year-olds?

Since I don't understand why their school buildings are closed I also don't understand why the mayor and chancellor can't provide a target date for reopening them.

Unless the DOE can clearly and succinctly explain why middle school kids can't be in school, they need to be in school. They need to be learning everything they should be learning. And they should have the fun, enriching, collaborative, social and hands-on parts of school.

Cordially,  
Eileen Gunn

A mentor once reminded me that any one person can be a change maker in any other person's life.

The more positive role models a young person has in their corner the greater the opportunity for the young person to meet a change maker.

Fair Futures coaches and tutors have been these change makers for over 1,000 young people in foster care in NYC throughout COVID-19 pandemic.

Good Afternoon, my name is Holly Smeltzer. I am a NYC foster parent. I am also the Fair Futures Program Director at the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services.

Amidst the crisis, Fair Futures coaches, tutors & support staff continue to help youth stay on track with academic and career goals, secure safe housing, provide emotional support and much more.

We still do not know the full implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on our youth as it relates to education. However, we do know that children across the city are:

- struggling with the challenges of learning remotely
- they do not have access to the technology, wi-fi, and other tools essential for learning
- They are struggling with stress, isolation, anxiety, and depression that this pandemic has created for so many of us.

We also know that:

- students with disabilities
- students who are recent immigrants and English language learner's
- and students who are over-age for their grade level

represent those at risk of falling further behind because of the crisis.

Now, consider a young person, dealing with all of these challenges, who represents one or more of those populations and is ALSO in foster care. For a young person like this, young people like OURS, Fair Futures is the connection, support, and lifeline they need, now more than ever.

As a member of the fair futures community and as a foster parent, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of the pandemic on our children.

Fair Futures has stood with NYC foster youth through COVID-19 so these young people have the support they need to not only survive this crisis, but THRIVE.

We must invest in our children now to ensure they have a fair shot at success later.

Fair Futures coaches, tutors and support staff CONTINUE to be change makers in the lives of our young people so they themselves can become change makers for the next generation.

Thank you to the chair and council for giving me this opportunity.



My name is Katie Napolitano and I am an adoptive parent to three young men who aged out of the foster care system in NYC. I also coordinate and oversee the implementation of Fair Futures, a coalition of over 100 organizations advocating for all young people in foster care to have the 1:1 supports they need from middle school through age 26.

This past year, the Administration for Children's Services received funding to implement the Fair Futures model system-wide, as the City recognized that there was a strong need to improve academic outcomes for young people in foster care. It was a crisis, really - approximately 40% of young people in foster care ages 14-21 were completely disconnected from any academic setting and only 20% of young people aging out of the foster care system had a high school degree/equivalency. As a result, former foster youth have often ended up in other City systems. After the pandemic hit, the need for individualized educational support for this population became even more urgent.

Luckily, we have a solution - a proven model that achieves strong educational outcomes for NYC foster youth that has been scaled systemwide - Fair Futures. Fair Futures provides all young people in middle school with a dedicated Middle School Specialist and 1:1, quality tutoring. In the critical 9th grade year, young people are paired with trained Coaches who provide emotional, academic, and career development support to help young people achieve their goals. Coaches stick with young people through the ups and downs - no matter what. At foster care agencies that implemented this model with private funding, 94% of their young people graduate high school by age 21, compared to only 20%. Approximately 75% immediately enrolled in postsecondary settings, and Coaches work to ensure no youth are disconnected or without stable housing.

**This past year, Fair Futures was successfully scaled across all 26 foster care agencies,** just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Over 300 Fair Futures coaches, tutors, and specialists were hired and received over 7.5 days of training from sector experts. These staff in turn have provided over 3,000 young people in foster care with 1:1 supports during the pandemic - they help students with virtual learning and provide educational advocacy, tutoring, coaching, and emotional support. Coaches had the enormous task of having to engage young people virtually, most of whom they had never met before in-person, and build a trusting relationship, which is at the heart and soul of this model. By June 2020, 99% of young people engaged with their Coach, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Fair Futures has had a systemic impact beyond the foster care system. Through Fair Futures, we brought One Degree to NYC, the City's first online resource directory that contains all of the transfer high schools, YABCs, high school equivalency programs with onsite career opportunities, and hundreds of quality internship, job readiness, and sector-based training programs. By March, One Degree will also contain all 350+ CUNY certificate programs and internship opportunities and all Career and Technical Education (CTE) Schools. While One Degree originally launched to help Fair Futures staff, youth, and caregivers identify best-fit schools and programs, it can be used by young people and adults citywide. Fair Futures has built a strong partnership

with CUNY and the DOE, and all DOE offices will receive a demo on how to use the directory. One Degree will be particularly helpful for high school staff/guidance counselors to more easily connect struggling students to alternative high schools or to help young people who are not (yet) college-bound connect to quality workforce and certificate programs.

Fair Futures is a game changer - we cannot take away these critical 1:1 academic supports and trusting relationships from young people in foster care. We are asking the City to please baseline \$20 million for Fair Futures in the Executive budget so that this long-term program can continue to impact thousands of the City's most vulnerable, most resilient young people.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am the parent of a Brooklyn Prospect Charter School student. I am writing to demand that City Council support the inclusion of ALL public school children, including those in NYC charter schools, in DOE's robust randomized testing program and that all teachers be included in any teacher-focused vaccination program

Because of concerns around teacher, staff, and student safety, our elementary school has not yet fully reopened. This has been so hard on many of the students and families in our community. Like so many parents around the City, we are struggling with balancing the desire for our children to learn in person with concerns about safety in the middle of this pandemic.

DOE's testing program has been widely praised by public health professionals as an important component in keeping Covid transmission in check in schools and throughout the community. We ask that charter schools be included in this program – our students, and our dedicated teachers and staff are equally at risk as those in DOE schools. We have no separate resources to fund standalone testing programs and our children have had to wait for many months longer than their DOE peers to be able to re-enter their classrooms.

Further we are appalled to hear that certain public school teachers, those who opted not to join the union, would be excluded from vaccination programs organized to quickly focus on classroom educators. We ask you to insist that public charter school teachers be invited to join those focused vaccination efforts.

Our school's student population hails from all over Brooklyn, and our teachers and staff from all over the City. Many of us have pre-existing conditions, or live in households with people particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. Extending the program to us would keep not only our students, staff, and teachers safer, but would also keep the communities our kids would go home to safer as well.

Thank you for your consideration,

Micah Drimmer



**Brilla Public Charter Schools**

**Reyes Claudio, Chief Operating Officer of Brilla Public Charter Schools**

**Testimony Presented to the New York City Council Education Committee**

**Wednesday, January 20, 2021**

Good afternoon, Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. My name is Reyes Claudio and I'm the Chief Operating Officer for Brilla Public Charter Schools, a network of five free, public charter schools in the Bronx<sup>[1]</sup>. As a proud Bronx native, Community Board 1 member and Brilla mom, I'm grateful for the opportunity to represent my community and present my testimony today.

While the COVID-19 crisis has affected virtually every aspect of how we do things at Brilla (pun fully intended!), it has not altered our commitment to support families in educating their children. After closing buildings in mid-March, we continued to honor all components of our holistic mission. We reached every single one of our 921 students and maintained daily attendance rates of over 90%. In order for all students to have access to the tools they needed to continue learning, we distributed some 750 Chromebook and 300 hotspot devices. With our learning specialists' creativity and the DOE's remotely delivering counseling and therapies, we continued to support all students, with extra attention given to our special populations which constitute more than half of our student-body. (At Brilla, 32% of our students are multilingual learners and 20% receive special education services). In order to support their social,



emotional, and physical needs, we provided food, essential supplies, and rental assistance to 150 of our most vulnerable families, many of whom do not receive needed services due to their immigration status or live in shelters. Ahead of the holiday season, we reinvigorated these efforts and provided provisions to an additional 100 families experiencing need.

While 32% of our nation's schools are currently operating 100% remotely (the highest it's been at any point this school year)<sup>[2]</sup>, we at Brilla are committed to staying open and will do whatever it takes to do so safely. There simply is no substitute for in-person care and attention. In order to open doors in September and keep them open, we implemented extensive safety measures and continue to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Most recently, due to NYC's failure to include charters in its test and trace systems, we were forced to navigate the private market for COVID testing in order to keep our buildings open according to the Governor's Cluster Action Initiative. Despite the enormous challenge this presented, our families are immensely grateful that we have prioritized them by keeping our buildings open.

Indeed, our families have demonstrated high levels of trust in us. Given the choice of fully-remote learning or in-person learning (where, depending on grade-level and special education status, students are either on campus 100% of time or alternate between remote and on-campus learning), more than half choose in-person learning from day one. At the beginning of January, an additional 86 families began in-person learning, bringing the percentage of families who chose in-person learning to 56%. A comment by one of our parents



perhaps describes Brilla the best: “Aquí hay la caridad” (Here there is loving care). How grateful we are to be able to give and receive that *caridad* once again!

We at Brilla will continue to endeavor to act in a prudent, not fearful way to best serve our families, students, and our staff knowing that what we do is so important for the wellbeing and future of our community and our country. Thank you for your time and service to our community. I’m happy to answer any questions the council members may have.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Brilla Public Charter Schools, K-8 schools in the classical tradition, help students to grow intellectually, socially, and physically into young men and women of good character and spirit and to be prepared for excellence in high school, college, and beyond.

<sup>[2]</sup> “U-Turn: Surge of COVID Cases Reverses Reopening Progress in America’s School Districts,” Center on Reinventing Public Education. [https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/u\\_turn\\_brief\\_jan\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/u_turn_brief_jan_2020_0.pdf).

## January 20, 2021 – NYC City Council Education Committee: Impact of COVID on Education

My name is Shawina Garnett-Evans and I am a Head Start Assistant Teacher as well as a parent of three scholars who attend Uncommon Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you.

I want to share how COVID-19 has impacted the education of children and the staff that serve them. At the start of the pandemic, no one knew what to expect. I thought along with many others that this would be something that may last about 3 months tops. Fast forward to almost a year later and it's still so surreal. When our schools first closed, so did my Head Start classroom and I was able to work at a Recreational Enrichment Center. This was a center for the children of first responders and essential workers. We were all scared for everyone's safety and wondered how we could thrive in a situation that was unlike anything we've ever experienced. Even though our student's parents were highly exposed, we were fortunate to have a COVID-19 free site for our 6 months of operation due to the diligent staff at the center. The most challenging part outside of wearing a mask all day was not being able to see each other's smiles and have the kids take comfort in our facial expressions or our arms. It took awhile for everyone to adjust but we were able to assist our students with their schoolwork/remote learning and more importantly connect with them. I am currently a UPK Assistant Teacher for Head Start which is remote only because our building is not cleared to open yet. Being remote only is hard especially for such young children but we all do our best to educate our students, make sure they have the tools they need, and are present to learn each day. At such a young age there is no replacement for being in school together learning social skills that are so critical at this time in their lives, but we are doing the best we can to persevere.

Being a parent on the other hand proved to be a lot more difficult, I feared for my children every day. Working on the frontlines with my students and also making sure that my children are safe is a delicate balance. When this first started my oldest Madison was a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Bed-Stuyvesant Collegiate and Michaela and Morgan were in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and kindergarten at Leadership Prep Brownsville Elementary School (all part of Uncommon Schools). I was unsure about them going back into the buildings for many reasons. My number one concern was safety because of a COVID-19 death at one of our co-located schools, which hits close to home. Loss of life due to this virus is concerning because staff and students share the same entrances, staircases, bathrooms, ventilation and sometimes floors. This is why I along with many other parents are confused as to why charter schools were not included in testing and tracing to protect all that share the same space. The layer of safety and protection that testing and tracing offers should not exclude people that share so many common spaces. We have to show grace for one another because this virus has shown us no mercy.

All of my children attend school remotely and were able to receive devices and a hot spot which was not easy because charter schools were not included in the allotment for all public-school students. Uncommon is doing what they can to persevere and continue to educate their students throughout this pandemic and as a parent, I will do all that I can to support my children and keep them safe. Uncommon is beginning to open schools for in-person learning between 1/20-1/25 because they know how important it is for our children to be in school learning with their teachers and classmates – there is nothing that can replace this. I can tell you firsthand that my children miss and need it and as a parent so do I. In-person instruction is what is best no matter the age or grade of the child, but it has to be safe, responsible and equitable. All schools need equitable support, resources and funding as well. I am asking that the City Council do all that they can to ensure that **ALL children and ALL schools** have what they need so that we can **ALL** reopen safely. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawina Garnett-Evans  
shawinae@gmail.com



# Spread Thin: Survey Reveals Students Without Special Education Instruction

*1,167 Respondents over 3 Weeks*



*Kindergartener hides away from remote ICT class.*

**BY PARENTS & ADVOCATES OF SPECIAL SUPPORT SERVICES, LLC**  
**NEW YORK CITY | DECEMBER 1, 2020**

*“My son’s teacher is covering both remote students and in-person students at the same time. We cannot always hear her. She’s trying to be there for all of the students and this is very unfair to everyone.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“The chief staffing issue we are experiencing is that on Blended/ Remote days, there are over 60 kids with 2 teachers on a Zoom screen. They can’t be seen all at once and teachers can’t really offer much outreach to Gen Ed or IEP students. It is a stretch for gen ed, but virtually impossible to implement an IEP with any sort of fidelity.” — Parent of a Blended Middle School Student*

## BACKGROUND



Struggling with remote learning.

During the 2019-2020 school year there were approximately 200,000 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) according to a November 2, 2020 [NYC Department of Education School-Age Special Education Data Report](#). As the [Return to School 2020](#) plan was being developed by the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), parents of this student population had limited opportunities to voice their specific suggestions or concerns about the upcoming school year.

While parents did receive surveys regarding learning preferences, and remote experiences during the spring of 2020, they could not record short- or long-form answers.

Additionally, Town Halls with Chancellor Richard A. Carranza and the [Beyond Access](#) series (organized by the Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support), vetted questions in advance, leaving no time for Q & A or direct input on the Return to School plan by parents of students with disabilities. Parents were particularly concerned that the NYC DOE was not looking at successful remote learning models for students with disabilities during spring 2020 that could be implemented in 2020-21.

In September 2020, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that school start dates would be delayed 10 days. In-person instruction, which was slated to begin on September 21 for those who opted in, was again pushed back until Monday, Oct. 5 for middle and high school students. After the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) expressed concerns regarding safe working conditions, the DOE determined separate teaching groups were needed to provide remote and in-person instruction.

Although there was a hiring freeze on new teachers until September 8, 2020, school principals and their union, the Council of Schools Supervisors and Administrators, signaled they would require thousands of additional hires to implement both blended and fully remote learning cohorts. Parents on School Leadership Teams (SLTs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) were also concerned there would not be enough teachers to support these options, (see full timeline at the end of this report). Once school started, parents of students with disabilities noted many of the same issues, including:

- No access to special education services as mandated by a student's IEPs
- No access to a certified special education teacher at all
- No access to 1:1 paraprofessionals
- Related service therapies scheduled during live instructional times (rather than during asynchronous or free periods of remote learning)

Complaints increased as teachers and therapists were spread thin between blended and remote learning groups. It became clear there was a need for organizations and stakeholders to publicly engage with NYC parents about what was happening in special education. On October 23, 2020, during the joint NYC Council oversight hearing [Reopening NYC Public Schools: Impact on Students with Disabilities](#), the UFT submitted [written testimony](#) that 2,000 educators needed to be redeployed, 4,500 additional qualified teachers needed to be hired, and a job description needed to be developed for the Virtual Content Specialist position to address the teacher staffing shortage.

**Survey: 49% blended and 43% of remote students receive less than 1 hour of live instruction per day.**

Stakeholder frustrations increased as the NYC DOE was unable to answer basic questions about student attendance, about how many teachers still needed to be hired, would integrated co-teaching (ICT) be provided, and did it adhere to the model of

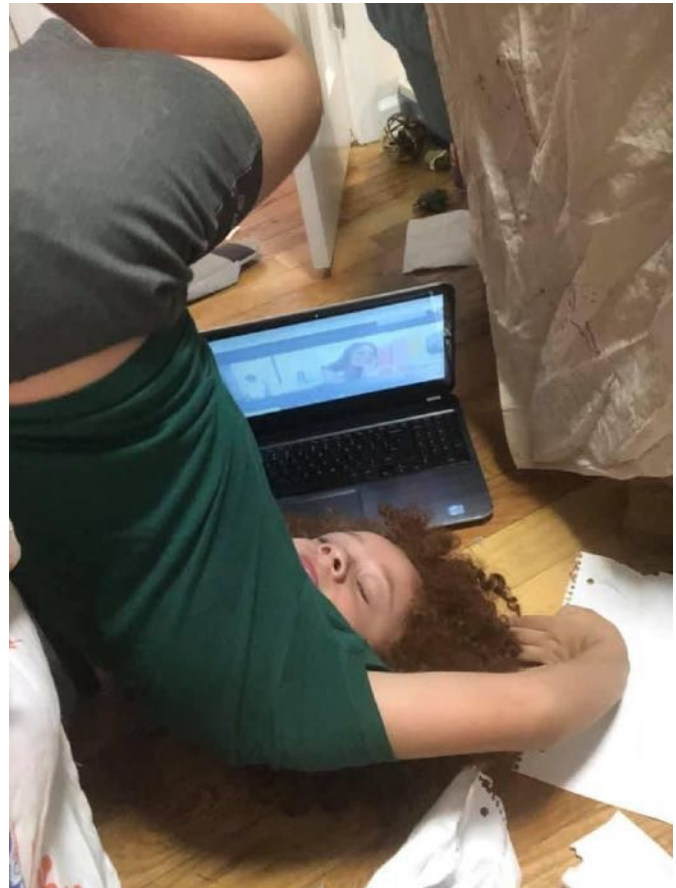
a “teaching team” made up of one certified special education and one general education teacher? To better inform the Council, it became clear there was a critical need to collect data from parents and caregivers, and make it available to the public at large.

This survey was created to investigate how the NYC DOE reopening plan created a teacher shortage that disproportionality affected students receiving special education services. The scope of this problem is large and wide ranging. Students with disabilities

are likely to fall behind faster and catch up slower. As peers to students without disabilities, there are repercussions for everyone: the overall pace of each class, progress made by the entire grade, and overall school achievement.

If the special education staffing issue is not addressed proactively, the remedies will not only become more time intensive, they will be more expensive. The cost will be borne by taxpayers, students, and the collective conscience of all New Yorkers. Ours is not a City that leaves its most vulnerable students behind. New York must strive toward equity for all children, including those with disabilities.

*“My child can not participate in remote classes so I’m basically homeschooling. I don’t think there is a solution, he needs 1x1 support to do async work and shuts down fully in Zoom group classes, but who would be available to do this 1x1 support, as he has ICT, no para and no SETSS on his IEP? His school is helpful and flexible. But I’m drowning, doing two full-time jobs at once and my child is falling behind.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary Student*



Third grader in remote special class (8:1:1).

## METHODOLOGY

[Special Support Services, LLC](#), a group of three advocates, Rachel Ford, Amber Decker, and Jennifer Choi, created this survey. Their mission is to support parents of students with disabilities as they move through the complex special education process in New York City. As the parents of students with disabilities in NYC public schools themselves, they also use their in-depth knowledge to volunteer in several disability-related advocacy groups both locally and nationally. While Special Support Services spearheaded this effort, many NYC parents contributed to shape the results. Please email [Jenn Choi](#) with additional questions about how the survey was developed and data recorded.

Findings represent a voluntary sampling conducted by nonprofessional pollsters, capturing a snapshot of what some families of students with disabilities experienced between October 7 and October 26, 2020. There were, and still are, many factors impacting each student’s ability to learn during the 2020 pandemic: technology access, home instability, food insecurity, child care, and transportation issues, among others. However, the focus of this survey is on staffing and its direct impact on the DOE’s school reopening plan.

This survey contains a combination of 42 multiple choice and open response questions; with separate sets for those who reported their child was in blended learning, (628) or in the fully remote model (469). Represented here, are the ideas and comments most reported by parents. Comments are largely unedited to preserve each parent’s voice and intention. Survey results by question are provided as a separate document. It is also important to note, while parents reported many problems, they also made sure to acknowledge the hard work of teachers, providers and school staff.

*“The remote class is massive at 45 kids. I’m begging for SpEd support...I really feel for the school-based team and feel like our principal is really trying his best to fill serious gaps. Zero confidence it will be done, but I’m working hard to keep the team abreast. On the plus side, the in-person team seems wonderful, so far.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary School Student*

## DISTRIBUTION

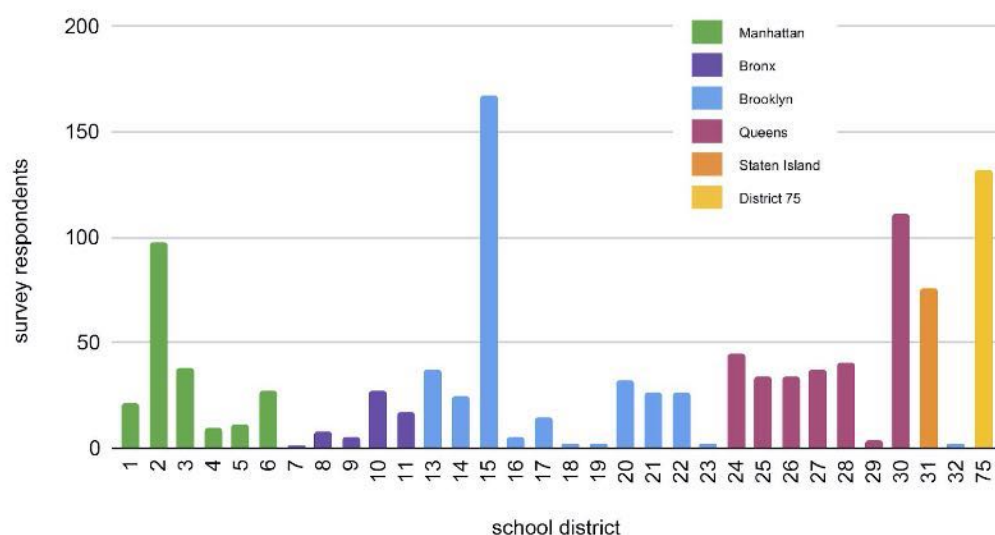
The survey was published in Chinese, Spanish and Korean, making it accessible to a wide audience. Distribution was driven mostly by parent volunteers who shared the survey across their social media platforms and neighborhood / interest-based listservs such as Google Groups, [groups.io](https://groups.io) and Facebook groups. *Spectrum News NY1*, *The Unmuted*, and *The World Journal* provided media coverage and posted links to the survey while it was open. Additional outreach was made to nonprofit organizations, borough presidents’ education liaisons and DOE-related groups, including: Community Education Councils, citywide education councils, and the Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council.



## RESPONSE OVERVIEW

Close to 34% of respondents have students attending schools in Brooklyn (the most represented borough) and 31% have students in Queens. These numbers do not include the 132 respondents with students in the citywide District 75 (D75). NYC Public School Districts 15, 30, 2, 31 have the highest percentages of survey respondents, and parents with students in D75 schools are the second most represented group in the survey. Least represented are families with students attending schools in the Bronx, and survey creators acknowledge that more work needs to be done to engage families in those areas.

### 1. Survey Respondents By School District



Parents of elementary students with disabilities (grades PK-5) make up 54% of all survey respondents. Parents of middle schoolers (grades 6-8) make up 15% and parents of high schoolers (grades 9-12) make up 11% of respondents. There were also a few responses from parents of students in NY State Approved Nonpublic Special Education Schools, private special education schools, and those who homeschool their children (6%).

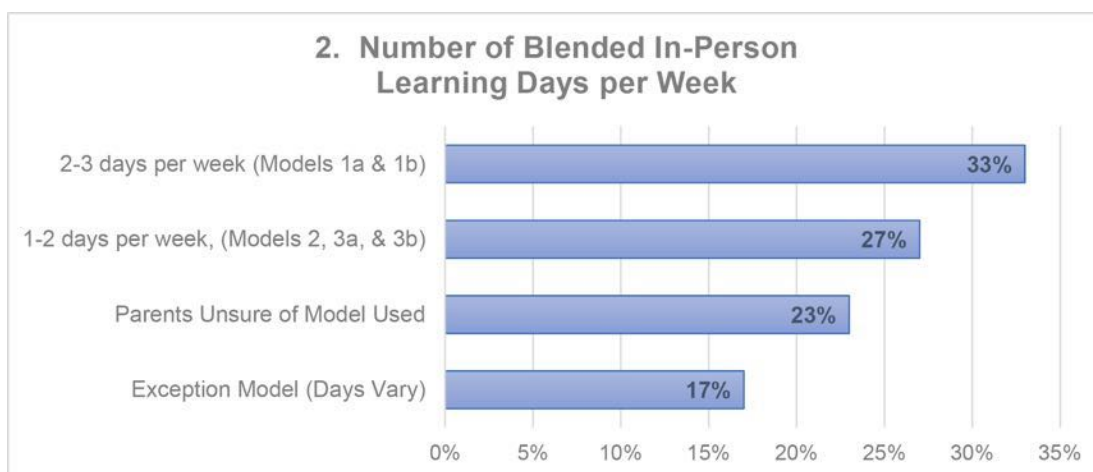
Capturing the impact of the staffing shortage was the main focus of this survey, and Question #3 asks which staff-related services are on each student's IEP. Parents were able to choose all that applied from a list, as many students receive more than one type of service including: ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching), SETSS (Special Education Teacher Support Services), special class size, such as self-contained classrooms of 8:1:1, and 12:1, and special programs like ASD Nest (an inclusion program with structured supports and smaller class size ratios for autistic students).

The majority of Question #3 respondents, 64%, identified having a child with an ICT service; 33% a special class size; and 20% with SETSS. ICT class setting was further broken down into High School AP/Honors (1%) and within a Specialized Program, including ASD Nest, Gifted & Talented/Accelerated and Bilingual Special Education (14%).

## BLENDING LEARNING: IN-PERSON

*“I wish schools were given more flexibility to increase the number of in-person days when space allows. With more kids opting for fully remote, it seems logical that those who need it most could be offered more in-person time.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary School Student*

The blended (or hybrid) learning model includes a mix of in-person and remote instruction. The majority of survey respondents (57%) have a student in blended learning. Students were defaulted into this model if their parent/guardian did not fill out the NYC DOE’s [Learning Preferences Survey](#), and opt into fully remote.



As part of the [Preliminary School Reopening Plans for Fall 2020](#), announced on July 8, 2020, NYC public schools could choose from a range of blended programming models for scheduling in-person learning. Of the 446 parents who responded to Question #6 asking respondents to identify which blended model their school was using, 128 followed Model 1 (two student cohorts alternating days with rotating Mondays), split almost evenly between cohorts 1A and 1B.

There were 86 following Model 2 (three student cohorts attending 1-2 days per week), and 65 who indicated their school had received an “exception,” and was not required to follow any of the models due to a physical space issue, or because of a specific community need. Most noteworthy, **90 respondents could not identify which programming model their school was using for in-person learning.** Of the 48 respondents in D75 schools, 34 followed Model 4 (two student groups alternating weeks) and 14 followed Model 5 (two student groups 2-3 days a week).

Question #7 tracked how many days per month students were in school for in-person learning. Respondents were able to choose from several ranges, with 68% attending 6-10 days per month on average. At the maximum and minimum ranges, 7% reported their students were in school 16 days or more each month, while 22% indicated their students were in school 5 days or less for in-person learning.

Of the parents who chose the blended model, many opted-in believing the small class sizes and increased teacher attention on in-person days would offset the limitations of remote days. However, nearly 20% of parents reported inadequate staffing on in-person learning days. Those with students in ICT classes (Question #10), were particularly affected, and 36% of respondents noted a problem with in-person ICT delivery. Of the respondents with students receiving SETSS (Question #12), 37% indicated the service was provided partially, or not at all. In self contained classrooms (Question #13), 21% of respondents reported their child lacked either a certified special educator or a paraprofessional.

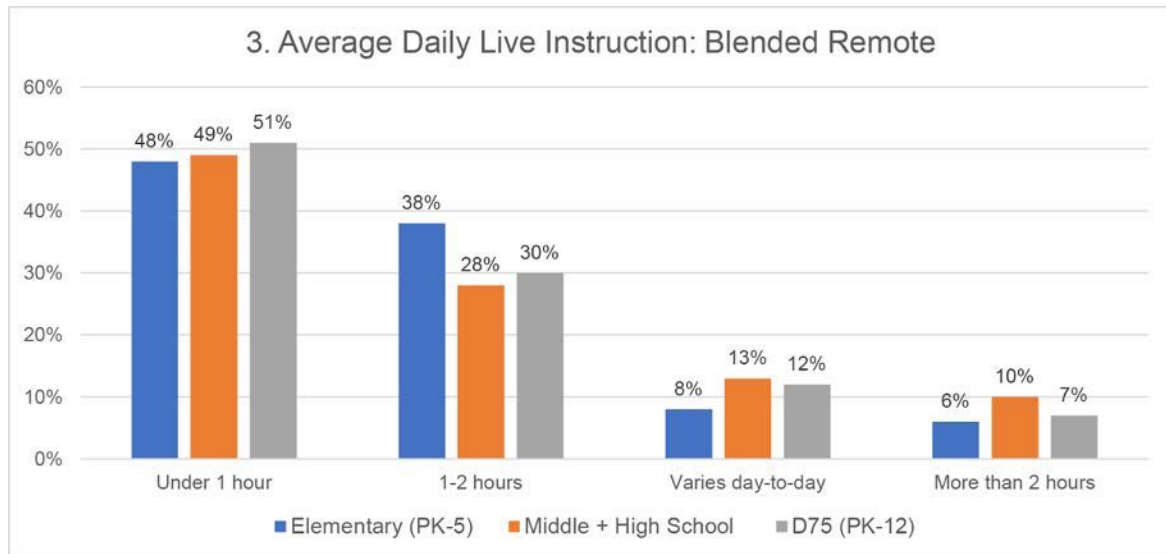
## **BLENDED LEARNING: REMOTE**

*“My child's teacher for remote learning has changed 3 times already. Today, he has no remote teacher. Some days, there are about 60 children in the remote class. My child is depressed and has regressed tremendously.” — Parent of a Blended PK-8 School Student*

Back in July 2020, when the DOE first announced there would be a blended learning model, it included guaranteed daily live instruction for remote periods. Linda Chen, DOE Chief Academic Officer, during a late August interview, got more specific: “Students from grades K-2 will have about 65-95 minutes of live instruction, while grades 3-5 will



have about 90-110 minutes of live instruction. Students in grades 6-8 are expected to receive 80-100 minutes of live instruction and high school students will receive 100-120 minutes.” (Mark Sundstrom, Kristine Garcia, “[NYC reaches agreement with teachers' union on 'instructional guidance' for remote and in-person learning: De Blasio](#),” *NY Pix11*, August 27, 2020)



By September 15, 2020, a day before the schools were set to open, (a week late), it was reported that the DOE had revised its guidance, no longer requiring that principals provide a set amount of time for live instruction on remote days. (Jillian Jorgensen, “[Blended Learning Students No Longer Required to Get Live Teaching on Remote Days](#),” *NY1 Spectrum News*, September 15, 2020).

Not only does this differ from what was initially promised, but it did not meet the DOE and UFT recommended guidelines set out in their [Blended Learning Agreements Document](#). By the end of October 2020, daily live instruction should be 70-100 minutes (K-2); 100-120 minutes (grades 3-5), 90-120 minutes (grades 6-8), and 120-130 minutes (grades 9-12).

Question #14 asked blended learning families how much time of live instruction students received during a typical remote day; 49% got less than 1 hour per day. When asked to choose a statement describing their blended child’s experience on remote days, 38% of parents felt, “My child gets way too much independent classwork/ self directed learning.”

## PARENTS SHARE

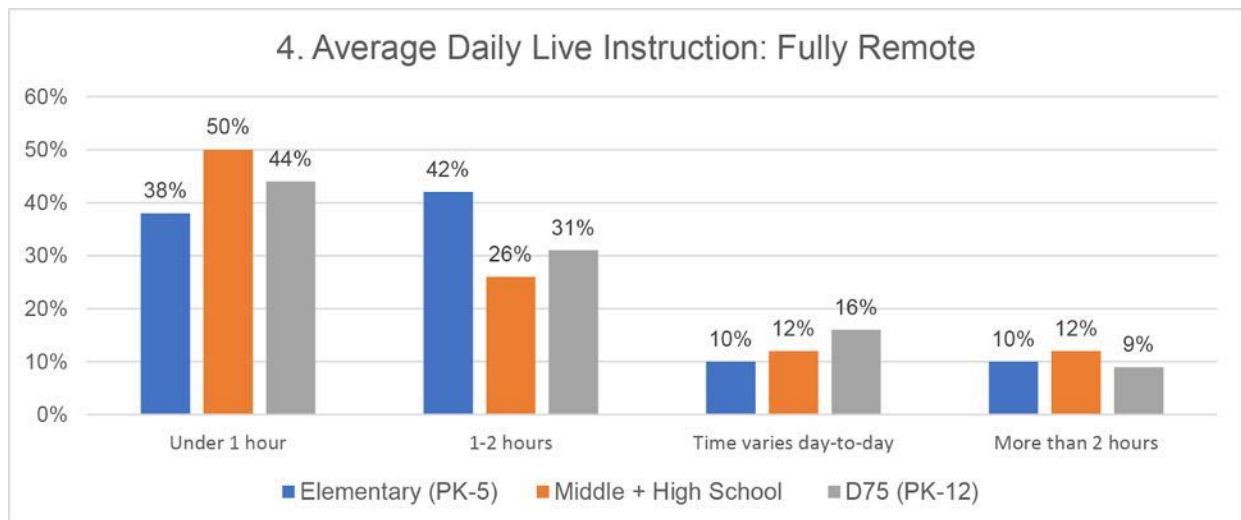
*“My child requires a lot of support to get through assignments. She cannot work independently very easily. She gets tons of support on in-person days, but not enough on remote days. Her teachers are mostly busy working with in-person students.”— Parent of a Blended Middle School Student*

*“My child is nonverbal and remote learning DOES NOT work for him, period!!!!”  
— Parent of a Blended Student in a NY State Approved NonPublic Special Ed School*

*“Remote learning is not appropriate for Kindergarteners. I think all NYC children should repeat their grade for next year.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary School Student*

## FULLY REMOTE LEARNING

Just under half of survey respondents, 43%, indicated their students were in the fully remote learning model, also called online or virtual learning. Parents noted almost the same amount of average daily live instruction; 49% of blended students on their remote days and 43% of those in the fully remote model reported they received less than one hour per day of live instruction. Questions #29, #31 and #34, captured how many respondents felt staffing issues played a role in the delivery of ICT (39%), SETSS (55%), and in self contained classrooms (27%).



## PARENTS SHARE

“因为语言不通，我的孩子上不了网课，无法正常上课”

*“Because of language barriers, my child cannot take online classes and cannot attend classes normally.” —Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“The class is taught by 1 teacher. Having an ICT teacher in class is pointless. There isn’t any one on one interaction with ICT teacher.”—Parent of a Fully Remote High School Student*

*“There have been no live instructional small break out groups and so far, only one live, very brief instructional math lesson. There has been no live ELA instruction, practice or assignments at all and no live writing instruction.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“Remote learning is too challenging for my child. Not enough outreach when my child appears to be falling behind. We are all miserable. Will he get more help when the pandemic is over?”— Parent of a Fully Remote High School Student*

## PARAPROFESSIONALS

Students with 1:1 paraprofessional support on their IEPs are often children with significant academic, behavioral or health support needs. Parents of blended and fully remote students were asked in Question #21 and #33 respectively, how often their child had access to their paraprofessional on remote learning days. Across both groups, 55% indicated they were getting either **no time at all**, or less than 30 minutes on remote learning days. Additionally, parents reported that when their child’s paraprofessional was present, they were engaged in unrelated class tasks.

## PARENTS SHARE

*“The Special Ed teacher is not typically present. Also, dedicated 1:1 para (specified in IEP) is only available during full class sessions and is used as a resource for all students.”*

*— Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“The para sits in the meetings but is not able to communicate specifically with my child, so she is basically a silent person attending class. It is checking a box but without providing any assistance.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“The para is remote, and all his classes have only one teacher. He is supposed to have live teaching for three classes on in-person school days, but one of the classes is remote! They are trying to help, but there is nothing they can do. More than 75% of the personnel is remote! There’s just not enough staff. Completely failing my 15 yr old. He went from B’s to low F’s and has lost all motivation.” — Parent of a Blended High School Student*

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SUPPORT SERVICES (SETSS)**

There were 218 respondents who indicated their child’s IEP mandated SETSS: 49% in the fully remote group and 51% in blended learning. Question #11 asked parents indicate if their child’s SETSS provider was a certified special teacher: 18% were either not certified in special education, or they only had a special ed certified provider for certain subjects (considered partial service). Question #12 asked how SETSS was provided (remotely, in-person, not at all), with 34% of blended parents reporting no service or partial service. Of the respondents with students in the fully remote group, more than half reported their child is not receiving all mandated SETSS hours, while 15% reported the SETSS provider was not a certified special education teacher, (Question #31).

## **PARENTS SHARE**

*“El tiene que tener setss de ELA y Math pero no los a tenido la clase de el era una clase de 40 niño bajó a 24 el se frustra mucho con las matemáticas.”*

*“He has to have SETSS in ELA and Math but he hasn’t had them. His class was a class of 40 kids and it has been lowered to 24. He gets very frustrated with Math” — Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

*“Not sure how SETSS is being implemented, as it is once a week indirectly and the instructor has never told me what her actual plan is.” — Parent of Blended Elementary Student*

*“My child lost about 30 SETSS sessions in the spring and I was told that CSE would not be providing any compensatory services even if the child has been shown to have fallen further behind his peers.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Elementary Student*

## DEEP DIVE: CLASS SIZE

*“One of the effects of the staffing shortage felt by ICT classrooms is that there are not enough special education teachers to meet the demand... and impinges on their teachers’ ability to correctly assess their progress and needs.” —MaryJo Ginese, UFT Vice President of Special Education, as part of [written testimony](#) for NYC City Council Joint Committee Oversight Hearing on October 23, 2020*

The following sections focus on specific data subsets pertaining to class size. The survey asked parents if they knew how many students were in their child’s class. Parents reported an incredible range of class sizes across grades and type of service, so the median provides a more accurate representation of the middle value within each data set.

## CHALLENGES WITH ICT SERVICE: BALLOONING CLASSES, INSUFFICIENT STAFF

TABLE 1: CLASS SIZE RANGE <b>BLENDED REMOTE ICT</b>	10 Students or Fewer	11-32 Students	More Than 32 Students	Largest Size Reported
Elementary	28%	58%	14%	60
Middle	12%	59%	29%	80
High		100%		30

TABLE 2: CLASS SIZE RANGE <b>FULLY REMOTE ICT</b>	10 Students or Fewer	11-32 Students	More Than 32 Students	Largest Size Reported
Elementary	3%	84%	13%	45
Middle	7%	73%	20%	40
High		91%	9%	38

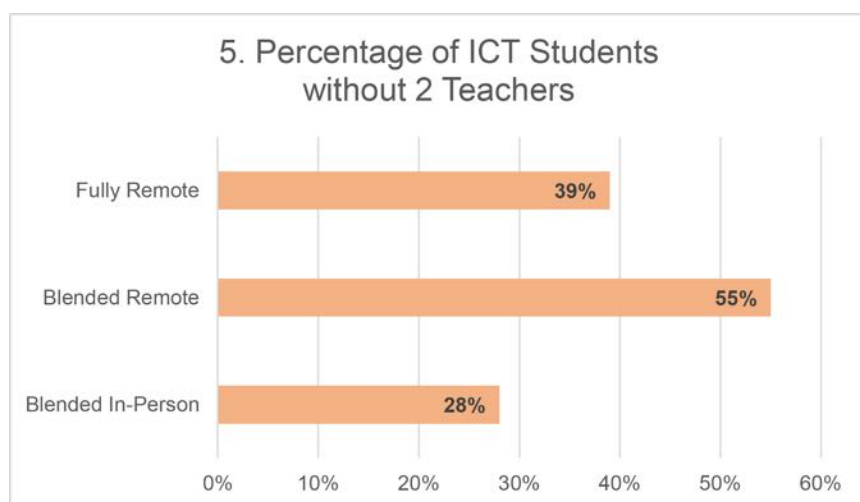
The majority of survey respondents, (55%), indicated their student received at least 45 minutes per day of ICT service, (283 fully remote / 384 blended). The maximum class size range for fully remote cohorts is very high: ranging from 38-45 students, but not as high as the blended remote ICT cohorts that range from 30-80 students.

It's important to note the percentages of parents who reported class sizes over the ICT class size limits set in the [United Federation of Teachers' guidance](#),

September 25, 2020. In addition to large class sizes, inappropriate staffing is also

an issue in ICT classes. Although the Integrated Co-Teaching model consists of one general educator and one teacher certified in special education teaching at the same time, the DOE has issued guidance allowing for blended remote ICT cohorts with one teacher. Many parents who completed our survey were not aware these new guidelines had effectively rendered the ICT model nonexistent.

**22% of students with ICT services have two teachers who **do not** teach together (one remote / one in-person)**



Parents also reported on appropriate staffing for ICT service in core subjects, (English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science), led by one general educator and one certified in special education across the blended and fully remote models. Additionally, 22% of

blended remote and fully remote parents reported their child had two teachers, but they were not teaching together.

This creates an illusion of appropriate staffing and compliance for ICT service, when in fact, one teacher is remote and the other is teaching in-person. In the fully remote group, 9% of parents reported their child had two teachers, but one was not a certified special educator.

*“The school is relying on breakout rooms a lot, but these breakout rooms don’t include the teacher and my son is often sitting alone in breakout rooms where all the other kids have neither mic nor camera on.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*

This crisis of staffing and large class size in delivering ICT services also negatively impacts students without IEPs as there are not enough properly trained educators for the cohort. Live instruction was also an issue, with 12% of parents reporting their student did not have any on blended remote days.

*“Every day, our principal completes a survey requesting 20 additional special ed teachers, as we are an all ICT school.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*

In Questions #19 and #28, parents were asked to pick the statement in a series that best described their child’s learning experience. Regardless of ICT services being delivered in the blended or remote model, the number one answer among parents was, *“My child gets too much independent classwork/self-directed learning.”* Broken down: 44% in blended and 30% in the fully remote ICT model.

By contrast, only 27% of blended and 21% fully remote parents felt that their child gets *“Just the right amount of live and self-directed instruction.”* Although many blended parents felt their student had too much independent and/or self-directed learning, half thought that teachers were not available during asynchronous instruction. By stark contrast, only 29% of fully remote parents felt that during asynchronous instruction, teachers were unavailable to their students.

Whether blended or remote, parents responded to Question #14 and #25, that their children with ICT services are spending a majority of their time in asynchronous instruction. The impact on working parents of children with disabilities is huge. This often means that parents, who are not trained, must step in as surrogate special educators during asynchronous class time. Acting as *de facto* teachers also takes away from parents’ ability to earn money for their families.

## PARENTS SHARE

*“Class size is over contractual limit of 32. Blended in-person cohorts are tiny. Everything is imbalanced. Special ed teacher for remote ICT has to cover 2 ICT classes—one third grade and one second grade.” — Parent of Blended Elementary Student*

*“My son’s ICT teacher does not know Algebra and said he is trying to support the students but it is challenging because he does not have experience in Math. He is also not present during live instruction for some periods because he is teaching another cohort.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*



## ASD NEST/HORIZON CHALLENGES: INCONSISTENCY

This data set is of particular interest to the three members of Special Support Services as each one has a student in specialized ASD programs. There were 113 respondents in this cohort; 95 in ASD Nest and 18 in the Horizon program. Consistent with other categories in the survey, elementary school students make up the largest group with 55%, followed by middle school with 19%; PK-8 with 12%; and high school 11%. The groups broke out evenly between those in blended learning versus those in fully remote.

Guidelines for ASD Nest and Horizon Programs recommend much smaller

class sizes (often in the 16-25 range), so it's not surprising that class sizes were small across all grades in the blended learning model; 70% of parents reported classes with less than 10 students. In the blended remote cohorts, 62% of parents responded classes also had less than 10 students and an additional 28% had 11-16. If these cohorts remain small after the opt-in deadline, (November 15, 2020), it may be feasible to consider in-person classes 5 days a week for students in these programs.

62% in blended ASD NEST and Horizon  
do not have access to their teachers  
during remote self-directed instruction.

In the blended remote group, 43% reported their students did not have two teachers during ICT services. This is only applicable to those in the ASD Nest program, as the model itself calls for one general education and one special education teacher. The majority, 49%, reported their student had between 1-2 hours of live instruction per day (Question #20), while an additional 37% received less than one hour. The majority of blended remote days are spent in asynchronous learning while at the same time, only 38% of parents report access to teachers during these periods.

Class sizes were considerably larger in the fully remote model, with 31% of respondents reporting classes between 20-29 students (Question #24); followed by 27% with 30 or more (maximum was 38). When asked to identify a statement that describes their child's fully remote experience, 40% of parents reported, "My child gets enough live instruction, but almost no breakout/small groups." In this cohort, 61% reported their students have appropriate staffing; although 32% reported there were not a general educator and a certified special educator. Question #25 asked about daily averages of live instruction, with 41% responding between 1-2 hours and 38% under 1 hour.



*“My son is in a self-contained ASD Horizon class, but he did so well in math last year that the school put 5 periods per week of ICT math in his IEP. He was never able to attend the ICT classroom for math because of the closures, and they can't offer him any inclusion right now.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary Student*

Notably, whether in blended or fully remote models, half the parents in this data set (57) reported that the chief staffing problem their children faced was, “Related services scheduled over live teaching periods for core subjects (ELA, Math, Social Studies, Science.” Training was also an issue, with 22% of parents responding that, while their child has a certified special education teacher, the teacher has not received ASD Nest or Horizon training (Question #33).

Not all school districts have an ASD Nest or ASD Horizon program, so many families take their children out of their zoned district, away from neighborhood peers, in order to benefit from specialized supports, trained staff, and the reduced class size ratios within these programs. When Nest and Horizon programs are not being provided with fidelity, families become disheartened that they gave up the convenience and ability to develop social relationships at their local school.

*“Almost every subject is being taught by a gen ed teacher with 18-27 kids, with no help in the breakout room....He goes to a different teacher's office hours every day. This is really a disaster for us. We have gone backwards. Infuriating.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student in the ASD Nest Program*

## **SPECIAL CLASS SIZE CHALLENGES: SMALL COHORTS MADE SMALLER**

Special Class Size refers to programs within a self-contained classroom (6:1+1, 8:1+1, 12:1, etc.). This group includes 345 respondents with students in D75 programs and Districts 1-32. While classes with ICT services trend with very large maximum numbers in each data set, the special class cohorts are quite small. These classes are small by design, yet they do not meet in-person 5 days per week consistently.

TABLE 3: SPECIAL CLASS SIZE RANGE IN-PERSON BLENDED	5 Students or Fewer	6-12 Students	More Than 12 Students	Smallest Size Reported
Elementary	64%	32%	4%	2
Middle	90%	10%		2
High	78%	22%		3

TABLE 4: SPECIAL CLASS SIZE RANGE BLENDED REMOTE	5 Students or Fewer	6-12 Students	More Than 12 Students	Smallest Size Reported
Elementary	41%	54%	5%	2
Middle	13%	87%		3
High	75%	25%		4

There were 212 parents who responded their student was in a special class size and following the blended model. Amazingly, both elementary and high school students had a significant percentage of blended remote cohorts under 5 students. Of the in-person blended students who answered, 76% reported having a certified special educator and a paraprofessional, 4% reported there was a special educator, but no paraprofessional, and 7% did not have a teacher who was a certified special educator. On the blended remote days, 75% reported having a certified special educator and a paraprofessional, while 8% did not have a teacher who was a certified special educator (Question #10).

When asked to select a statement that best describes their blended remote student's experience in a special class, 41% said, "My child gets a just right amount of live instruction and self-directed learning," while 27% reported, "My child gets too much independent class work/self-directed learning (Question #19).

*"My child only receives actual education on the days he goes to school, 2 or 3 days. This is insufficient for his needs. I am a working single parent. I need him to be in school for 5 days in order to progress academically and with his social communication issues."* —  
Parent of a Blended Elementary Student

Regardless of school level, the majority of parents with fully remote students indicated a class size range of 6-12 students. Fully remote class sizes skewed slightly larger than blended remote classes, with one parent reporting a special class of 30 elementary students. Staffing in the self-contained classes appears to be more appropriate than in classes providing ICT.

There were 133 parents who responded their student was in a fully remote special class. Of those parents, 66% reported there was a certified special educator and a paraprofessional, while 7% did not have a teacher certified in special education (Question #34). One parent even reported their student in a self-contained 6:1:1 class was being instructed by an art teacher, without special education certification.

<b>TABLE 5: SPECIAL CLASS SIZE RANGE: FULLY REMOTE</b>	<b>5 Students or Less</b>	<b>6-12 Students</b>	<b>More Than 12 Students</b>	<b>Smallest Size Reported</b>
<b>Elementary</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Middle</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>High</b>		<b>87%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4</b>

When asked to select a statement that best describes their fully remote student's experience in a special class, 38% said, "My child gets just the right amount of live instruction and self-directed learning," while 27% said, "My child gets too much independent class work/self-directed learning," (Question #28).

## PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SETSS CHALLENGES: NO GUIDANCE

*"Additional guidance on remote duties and responsibilities for paraprofessionals in remote settings is forthcoming."* [UFT Memorandum of Agreement](#), Section 8, September 25, 2020

The need for explicit guidance is paramount as so much of this service is normally delivered with close proximity between the student and the paraprofessional. To this point, the only guidance available on the [UFT](#) website describes the multiple ways in which paraprofessionals can perform duties unrelated with 1:1 student support in accessing the curriculum given the constraints of remote learning. Paraprofessionals are now allowed to take cafeteria duty, hall duty, attendance processing, small group

instruction, and assistance with health screening upon entry. The problem is compounded by the rigidity within the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), an agency providing many high needs students with disabilities home and community based services. Since NY State guidance does not allow community habilitation or respite worker support during school hours, parents become paraprofessionals to their children, as described below:

*“They will not send a para home....My husband and I have taken staggered leaves from our jobs and cut back on hours to make this work. It really upsets me that both the DOE and OPWDD offer nothing to support these students at home.” —Parent of a Fully Remote High School Student in the ACES Program*

*“There has to be a more effective way to have 1:1 para support. [OPWDD] Comm hab and respite can not be used during school hours, so if your child receives 1:1 support, how are they to be effectively supported while at home? Those needs do not disappear.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*

## TRYING AND IN PROGRESS

Parents had the chance to directly address staffing issues to their schools and superintendents (Question #37), and in a follow up question, report on progress, if any, in getting mandated IEP services; 450 responded. More than 75% of the responses involved parents reaching out to teachers or principals, and waiting, while other parents indicated reaching an impasse. Their stories are heartbreaking.

*“School has requested more teachers. They are so tired. And frustrated. They are making sure to give him office hours but what he needs is to not feel so stupid which is what this workaround is doing to him.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*

*“I initially spoke with the special education coordinator about it. It’s been two weeks since then so today I reached out to the principal and am waiting to hear back.” — Parent of a Fully Remote Middle School Student*

*“The principal told me we should consider getting services outside of the school because they are not given the resources.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary School Student*

*“My child has no special education teacher on remote days. I had a call with the principal, was told nothing they could do.” — Parent of a Blended Elementary School Student*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*“Unfortunately, this summer, a lot of focus has been on square footage and masks, and the frustrating part is that remote learning will account for at least 60% of a child’s experience. As a school leader, I’ve had little to no time to wrap my head around that.” – Manhattan School Principal, (Leslie Brody & Katie Honan, [“Help Us Get Better at Remote Instruction, NYC Public School Teachers Ask,”](#) *The Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2020*

The pandemic began nine months ago, and will most likely continue well into 2021. While it’s impossible for parents to recognize every issue facing the NYC Department of Education in developing the Return to School 2020 Plan, it’s past time for responses like “trying” and “in progress.” In reviewing the hundreds of comments from parents throughout the City, one thing is clear: parents of students with disabilities want a chance to be heard, which means an open and direct dialog with the Chancellor and Central DOE staff. These parent voices also represent what is happening on a greater scale to the 198,297 students with IEPs across the City.



Overwhelmed by an assignment.

The DOE’s *Learning Preferences Survey* results, published October 9, 2020, reveals that 52% of children learn in fully remote classes. When added to the 48% who chose blended learning, more than half of all class time is spent in a virtual setting. However, as of October 26, 2020, according to the DOE school attendance records (published on its website), only 26% of students enrolled in the blended model actually attended classes in-person. With 1.1 million children attending NYC public schools, roughly 283,000 showed up to schools in-person. It appears the majority of staffing, building, and equipment resources are currently being allocated to a quarter of students.

There has to be a better plan with a more equitable allocation of resources, and Special Support Services supports the [City Council Education Committee Chair Mark Treyger's proposal](#) to include students with disabilities for prioritization. As providing truly appropriate services has always been a priority for New Yorkers, Special Support Services consistently shares the hashtags #NYCSpEdShortage and #EveryonesProblem in its social media.

The one, (and currently only), opt-in deadline for blended learning during the 2020-21 school year passed on November 15. A few days later, on November 18, Mayor de Blasio shut down all public schools due to a 7-day Covid positivity rate above 3%. As this report was being finalized on Sunday, November 29, the Mayor reversed that decision, announcing he would abandon the 3% threshold, and reopen elementary schools for 5 days/week in-person instruction (when possible), on December 7 for those who chose the blended (hybrid) model.

While this is a positive step, there are still no plans to bring middle and high school students back to school. Many parents of children with disabilities already opted for fully remote learning, so it is still probable that many students with disabilities will spend more than one year with no in-person instruction. To date, the DOE does not have a proactive plan to measure and address the prolonged effects of fully remote and/or blended remote learning, and truncated/partially delivered services, on students with disabilities. Recommendations to address these issues are listed below:

- 1. Prioritize and provide 5 days of in-school instruction to high needs students with disabilities.** All too often, at the school level, parents are told, “It’s all kids with IEPs or no kids with IEPs.” Education for students with disabilities is not a One-Size-Fits-All model. Embracing equity for students means prioritizing those in our community with the highest needs and in the most restrictive programs. Students with special class size (including, but not limited to, those in District 75) should have higher priority than a student with related services only. Their needs are well documented in IEPs that detail their degree of need and program type. Collaboration with parents is also necessary to collect and solicit best practices in remote learning for students with disabilities.

2. **Remove [DOE guidance](#) that suggests Integrated Co-Teaching Services be provided by one teacher to Blended students on their remote learning days.** Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), that is often provided through Integrated Co-Teaching services such as small group instruction, 1:1 instruction, prompting, and checking for understanding are ineffective without the co-teaching staff working together in real time. The City's ability to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to all students is impossible without appropriate staffing and services.
3. **Remove [DOE guidance](#) that suggests the doubling of teacher caseloads.** This creates an impossible burden on teachers who want to properly serve students with disabilities. Given teachers are contractually limited to 25 teaching periods, students with 20-25 hours of ICT service, or Special Class Size, might not have any synchronous live instruction. While this might be appropriate for some, it isn't appropriate for all students with disabilities.
4. **Enforce existing guidance by the Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support/Special Education Office in which related services cannot be provided during the limited live instruction periods that students are receiving now.** Scheduling related services, such as OT and speech therapy, during live (synchronous) instruction exemplifies how two special education services are provided to one student at the same time. The objective of related services is to improve the student's ability to achieve his/her educational goals. Removing them from limited live class will only cause barriers to student progress.
5. **Recognize and clarify what is appropriate special education service delivery, as asynchronous remote instruction is often not effective for students with IEPs.** School Based Support Teams should consider strategies such as small group and individualized instruction when defining appropriateness of each remote period of ICT or Special Class. Moreover, in the Program Adaptations Document ([PAD](#)), these considerations should be memorialized and clear implementation guidance should be documented. If a student requires such instruction during an asynchronous period, it should be provided without haste. If this is not possible due to inadequate staffing, it should be documented on the IEP, and the PAD, that the appropriate service was not delivered or was partially delivered.



6. **Immediately issue explicit guidance on how IEP-assigned paraprofessionals can support students remotely.** School staff and parents need instructions for challenges: how to maximize participation; how to determine the amount of time to work together remotely, including frequency and durations of each meeting per day; how to exchange information between in-person and blended remote paraprofessionals and teachers; how to effectively assist the student during both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Special Support Services strongly agrees with [New York State Education Department guidance, issued April 27, 2020](#), which stresses, “*Making every effort possible now to provide required special education programs and services is the most effective way to mitigate the need to provide compensatory services in the future.*”
7. **Work with parents and guardians to collect and solicit best practices in remote learning for students with disabilities.** More than ever, as the classroom has moved into the home, parent feedback is critical to establishing what is appropriate education for their child. Additionally, not only are parents [members of the IEP Team](#), but their needs are also supported by federal law ([20 U.S.C. § 1400\(d\)\(1\)\(B\)](#) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which ensures that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected).
8. **Immediately issue guidance to school staff and parents about obtaining compensatory services.** The NY State Education Department issued [guidance](#) for providing compensatory services during the 20-21 school year in June 2020. While the staffing shortage is challenging, understanding and documenting the specific problems is imperative so that children will be eligible for compensatory services. As a result, this may reduce stress and feelings of hopelessness in families. **Offer [P-4s](#) when services do not happen or have been missed due to staffing issues.**
9. **NY State Agencies: Re-evaluate and change preventive rules that limit nonprofit and government support agencies from helping children with disabilities during school hours.** This is especially relevant for families who receive home based and community support through the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). The state agency must acknowledge our City’s circumstances to make education accessible for children who cannot attend in-person instruction. **OPWDD must remove [their interim guidance preventing community habilitation and respite services](#) from taking place during school hours when a child participates in remote learning.**



Survey results reveal that remote learners are getting less than an one hour of live special education instruction per school day. There must be oversight as to how the NYC Department of Education provides special education services for the remainder of the remote school day. Define school hours as only those with live synchronous instruction, rather than “Regular K-12 school hours,” which includes self-directed instruction.

**10. NY State Education Department must intervene as soon as possible and investigate the appropriateness of the reopening schools for students with IEPs.**

When the DOE writes guidance permitting half the needed staffing to provide a service, or allows a teacher to take on two caseloads, this can lead to claims that a service was provided while in essence, a student from another class was being served. Asynchronous instruction is not appropriate for all students with disabilities and thus such practices require inspection.

**11. Prepare a proactive plan for the end of the pandemic.** A proactive plan with input from all stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, providers, central DOE staff, must be developed now to address the prolonged effects of remote learning on students with disabilities. Opportunities for academic, social and physical skills remediation should be built into future school years, without filing for a due process hearing. Without the latter built into this plan, those with the least agency and resources will not have access to file due process complaints, resulting in the continued segregation within special education communities.

**12. Uphold the right to a barrier-free education as protected by law, especially during the pandemic.** These rights cannot be protected for children with disabilities when legally mandated services are not being provided appropriately. All parents, whether their child has a disability or not, should question a school district that is not following the law. #NYCSpEdShortage is #EveryonesProblem.

## THANK YOU

This survey would not have been possible without the efforts of many parents of students with disabilities including Henry Eagar, Jennifer Logan, Amy Menes, Yajaira Díaz, Micaela Walker, and to those parents and teachers who contributed, including those who volunteered to speak to the media and those who chose to remain anonymous—thank you.

## REFERENCE: EVENTS LEADING UP TO STAFFING SHORTAGE TIMELINE

**July 8, 2020** – DOE School Reopening Plan published.

**August 7, 2020** – Parent notification deadline to opt-in to remote only learning.

**August 19, 2020** – NYC Teachers Union (United Federation of Teachers) threatens to strike if certain safety criteria are not met prior to re-opening.

**August 23, 2020** – Press Conference. Based on ongoing negotiations with UFT, NYC DOE provides instructional guidelines to Principals. Three sets of teachers now needed: one set for blended in-person learning, another for same children when blended remote and another for fully remote students. (Selim Algar, “[NYC Principals Warns of Staffing Crisis Amid School Reopenings](#),” New York Post, August 28, 2020)

**August 24, 2020** - Mark F. Cannizzaro, President of Council of Schools Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) sends letter to Mayor and Chancellor Carranza noting that “Regrettably, the DOE has now created a potential staffing crisis with weeks to go before the first day of school [at time of letter, September 10].” (Full letter included as part of Eyewitness News, “[Principals’ Union CSA Fires Back Against NYC Schools Teaching Teams for ‘Blended Learning’](#),” WABC 7, August 28, 2020)

**August 27, 2020** – DOE and NYC Teachers Union come to an “instructional guidance” agreement around staffing. According to this agreement, “Students from grades Kindergarten to 2 will have about 65 to 95 minutes of live instruction while Grades 3 to 5 will have about 90 to 110 minutes of live instruction. Students in grades 6 to 8 are expected to receive 80 to 100 minutes of live instruction and high school students will receive 100 to 120 minutes, according to Linda Chen, NYC DOE Chief Academic Officer.” (Mark Sundstrom, Kristine Garcia, “[NYC reaches agreement with teachers' union on 'instructional guidance' for remote and in-person learning: De Blasio](#),” NY Pix11, August 27, 2020)

**September 1, 2020** – City pushes in-person school re-opening to September 21.

**September 3, 2020** - DOE issues new guidelines for [Special Education in Blended and Remote Settings](#) including [guidance to schools](#) on how to staff appropriately a blended remote class designated for [ICT service with just one teacher](#). (Michael Elsen-Rooney “[NYC Education Dept’s Remote Learning Plan for Special Education Students Flouts State Law: Advocates](#),” *New York Daily News*, September 10, 2020)

**September 8, 2020** – DOE lifts its hiring freeze for teachers.

**September 8, 2020** – Teachers return to classrooms.

**September 10, 2020** – Original set first day of school, then cancelled on September 1, 2020.

**September 16, 2020** – DOE announces students enrolled in blended learning are not guaranteed live or “real time” instruction.

**September 17, 2020** – DOE announces that September 21 start date will only include in-person school for 3K, PK and D75 students only. Elementary schools will start with in-person learning on September 26 and middle/high school students on October 1.

**September 16-18, 2020** – Framed as remote orientation period. Then on September 17, 2020, school schedule is adjusted to 3K, PK and D75 students going in person on September 21.

**September 21, 2020** – First day of in-person school, then cancelled September 17 and made it the first day of in-person school for 3K, PK and D75 students only. Remote school started for K-12.

**September 25, 2020** – After further UFT negotiations, DOE allows more teachers to work from home. Same negotiation “bars principals from compelling teachers to live stream on-site classes to kids learning remotely.” (Selim Algar, [“New Deal With DOE Lets UFT Teachers Work from Home If Not Needed On-Site,”](#) *New York Post*, September 25, 2020) Further adding to the staffing crisis, the article notes that “16,000 teachers—or 21 percent of the citywide total—have coronavirus medical exemptions that will allow them to work from home.”

**September 27, 2020** – Citing staffing concerns and lack of confidence in a twice-delayed reopening plan, Council of School Supervisors and Administrators asks NY State to seize control of the school system from the Mayor. (Eliza Shapiro, [“Principals Assail NYC Mayor, Calling for State Takeover of Schools,”](#) *The New York Times*, September 27, 2020)

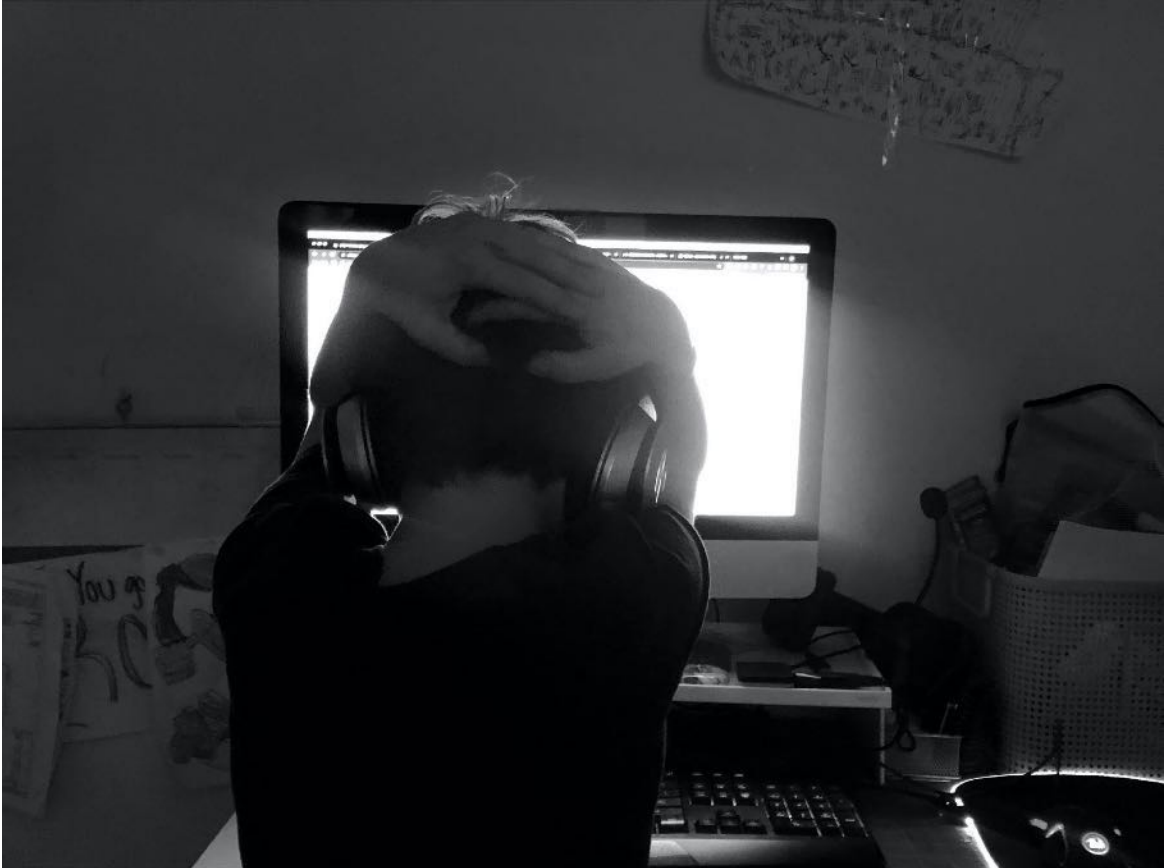
**September 29, 2020** – First day of in-person school for elementary and PK-8 schools.

**October 1, 2020** – First day of in-person school for middle and high school students.

**October 6, 2020** – 16 schools located in Governor Cuomo’s Red Zone areas are closed and go fully remote; by October 8, 2020, 124 schools are closed due to spiking infection rates.

# Spread Thin: NYC Special Education Teacher Shortage Survey Results

*1,167 Respondents, October 7–26, 2020*



**COMPILED BY PARENTS & ADVOCATES OF SPECIAL SUPPORT SERVICES, LLC**  
**NEW YORK CITY | DECEMBER 1, 2020**

*NOTE: Questions involving open or long-form text responses not included. This also creates the appearance of missing questions, as number order is out of sequence.*

## Q1 Which option best reflects your child's school? Select one.

Answered: 1,108 Skipped: 7

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Elementary School (PK-5)	54%	602
Elementary/Middle School (PK-8)	9%	104
Middle School (6-8)	16%	172
Middle/High School (6-12, 7-12)	2%	27
High School (9-12)	11%	125
NY State Approved NonPublic Special Education School (preK-12)	3%	36
Private School (Non-Approved)	2%	25
Home Schooled (IESP)	1%	14
Home instruction (Medical Reasons)	0%	3
TOTAL		1,108

## Q3 Please indicate which of the following services are on your child's IEP? Check all that apply.

Answered: 1,053 Skipped: 62

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) (most ICT programs)	47%	500
Special Class Size (Self-contained class) (ex. 6:1:1, 8:1:1, 12:1, 12:1:1, 15:1)	34%	356
Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS)	21%	218
Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) in a DOE Specialized Program (i.e., Dual Language, ASD Nest/Horizon, Gifted & Talented/Accelerated, Bilingual Special Education)	14%	146
Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) AP or Honors Class (High School Only)	2%	17
Total Respondents: 1,053		

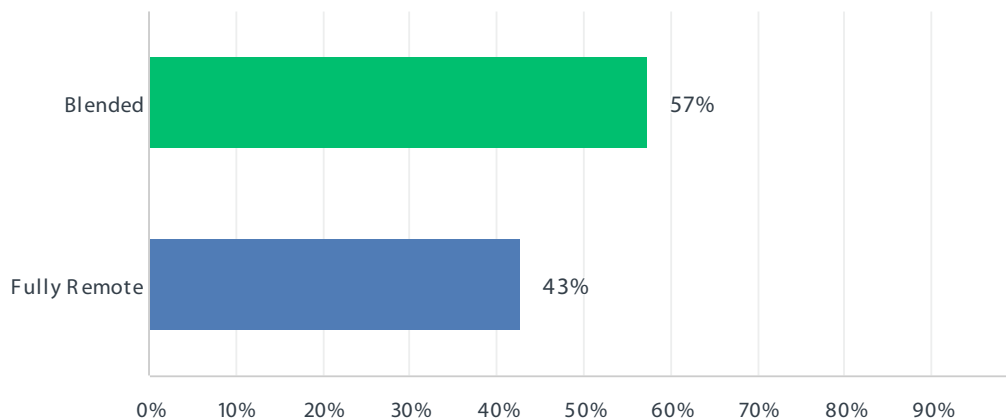
## Q4 If you indicated ICT as part of a DOE Specialized Program, please indicate that program below:

Answered: 237 Skipped: 878

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
ASD Nest/ASD Horizon	67% 159
G & T/Accelerated/Honors	13% 31
Bilingual Special Education	11% 26
Dual Language	9% 21
TOTAL	237

## Q5 Which of the following best describes your child's current learning program: (Note: If you are homeschooling, pick the program that best describes what you are providing.)

Answered: 1,097 Skipped: 18



## Questions 6-22 for BLENDED MODEL students only

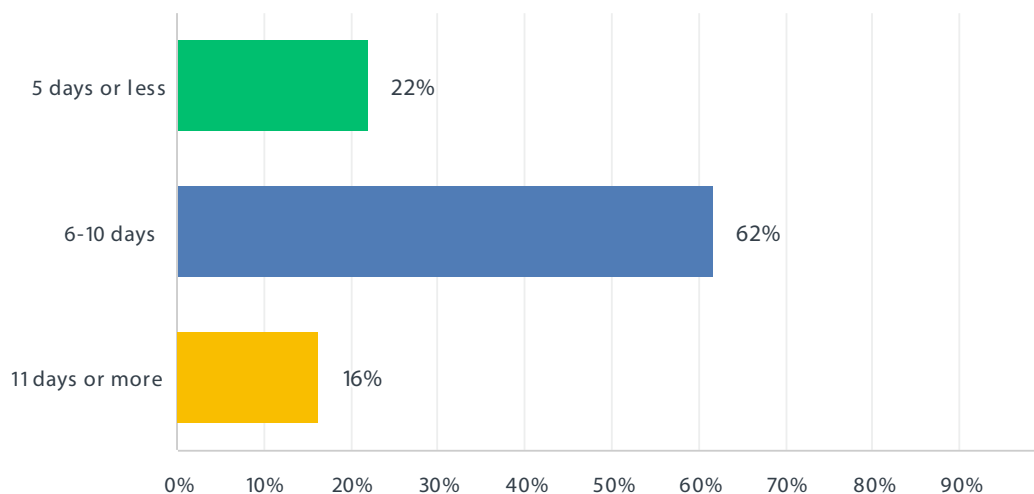
Q6 Indicate what schedule model your school is using to schedule students for in-person learning days. If you do not know, try the Find Your School tool. Open your school's profile page, scroll down to and select "School ReOpening Plans for Fall 2020" (by the orange book icon) and then look for the heading, "School Schedule Model."

Answered: 446 Skipped: 669

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Model 1A or 1B	29%	128
Not sure	21%	92
Model 2	19%	86
My school has an Exception.	15%	69
D75 Model 4	8%	34
Model 3A or 3B	5%	23
D75 Model 5	3%	14
TOTAL		446

Q7 For Blended Learning, which number range below indicates the average total number of in-person learning days your student has per month?

Answered: 450 Skipped: 665



## Q8 As of this moment, do you know how many students are in your child's in-person Blended Learning class?

Answered: 454 Skipped: 661

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	81%	366
No	19%	88
TOTAL		454

Q10 Answer only if ICT is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). For in-person, Blended Learning days, does your child have 2 teachers - one general educator and one certified special educator in the classroom for the majority of core subjects (ELA, Social Studies, Science, Math)? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.

Answered: 291 Skipped: 824

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	59%	173
No	29%	85
Two teachers, but not at same time (1 remote, 1 in person)	10%	28
There are two teachers, but neither is a special educator.	2%	5
TOTAL		291

Q11 Answer only if SETSS is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). Are your child's SETSS provider(s) a certified special educator? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.

Answered: 121 Skipped: 994

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	44%	53
I do not know.	31%	38
No	13%	16
Not always, depends on subject	12%	14
TOTAL		121



**Q12 Answer only if SETSS is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise skip). Please indicate the service delivery below that best describes your child's current SETSS:**

Answered: 92   Skipped: 1,023

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
My child receives a combination of SETSS periods in-person and remotely.	29%	27
All of my child's mandated SETSS periods are delivered remotely.	25%	23
My child is supposed to have SETSS, but the school is not providing any SETSS.	18%	17
My child is supposed to receive SETSS, but the school is only providing some of the SETSS periods.	15%	14
All of my child's mandated SETSS periods are delivered in-person.	12%	11
TOTAL		92

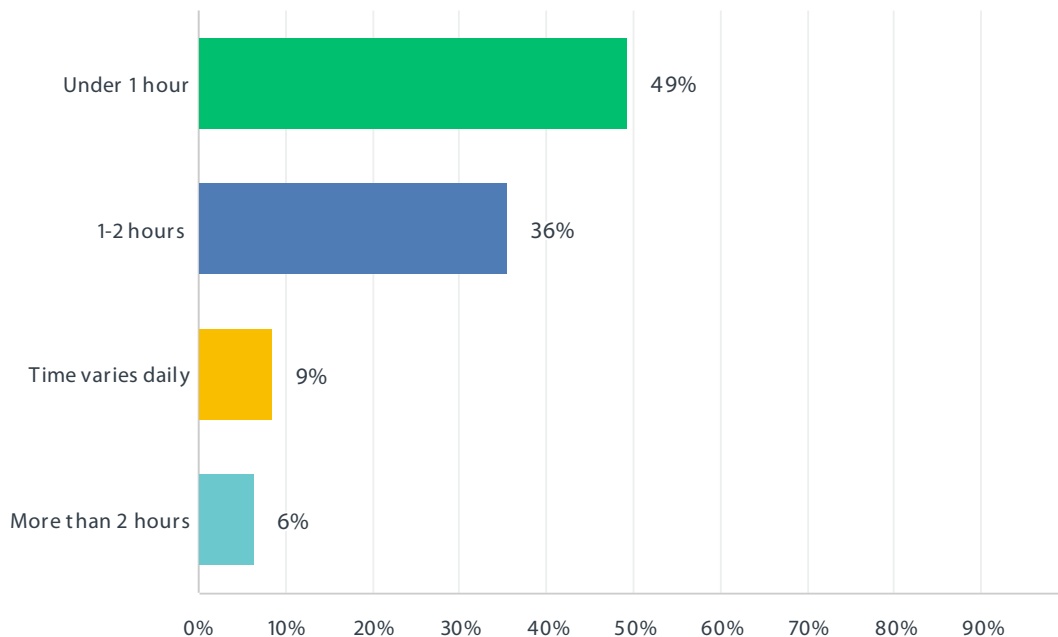
**Q13 Answer only if your child's IEP indicates a self-contained classroom and (otherwise skip). My child's in-person, self-contained classroom has a certified special education teacher and a paraprofessional? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.**

Answered: 151   Skipped: 964

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	68%	102
No	7%	11
There is a teacher, but that person is not a certified special education teacher.	7%	10
There is only a certified special education teacher and no paraprofessional.	7%	10
Unable to verify if teacher is certified special education teacher.	12%	18
TOTAL		151

**Q14 For remote Blended Learning, which number range below indicates the average total minutes of live instruction your child receives per remote Blended Learning day:**

Answered: 387 Skipped: 728



**Q15 As of this moment, do you know how many students are in your child's remote Blended Learning class? (TIP: You can check your child's Google Classroom and count the number of students in a particular class.)**

Answered: 399 Skipped: 716

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	69%	275
No	31%	124
TOTAL		399

## Q17 For remote Blended Learning, did the teachers provide your child with a weekly schedule that details live instruction and self-directed learning periods?

Answered: 389 Skipped: 726

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	72%	280
No	28%	109
TOTAL		389

## Q18 For remote Blended Learning, are your child's teachers available to assist your child during independent/ self-directed classwork (asynchronous instruction)?

Answered: 391 Skipped: 724

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	41%	160
Yes	30%	117
I'm not sure.	29%	114
TOTAL		391

## Q19 In the remote model of Blended Learning, the following statement best describes my child's experience:

Answered: 380 Skipped: 735

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
My child gets too much independent classwork/ self-directed learning.	38%	144
My child gets a just right amount of live instruction and self-directed learning.	28%	106
My child gets enough live instruction, but almost no breakout/small group time.	20%	75
My child gets too much live instruction with whole class group.	10%	38
I don't know as my child has not begun remote learning for the Blended Learning model.	4%	17
TOTAL		380

**Q20 Answer only if ICT is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). For remote Blended Learning days, does your child have 2 teachers - one general educator and one certified special educator in the virtual classroom for the majority of core subjects (ELA, Social Studies, Science, Math)?**

Answered: 248 Skipped: 867

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	53%	132
Yes	33%	83
No live instruction at all on remote days.	12%	30
There are two teachers, but one is not a certified special educator.	1%	3
TOTAL		248

**Q21 Answer only if a full-time paraprofessional is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). How often does your child have access to his/her/their paraprofessional on remote learning days?**

Answered: 120 Skipped: 995

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 30 minutes	29%	35
My child does not have access to a paraprofessional on remote learning days, even though a paraprofessional is listed on my child's IEP.	27%	32
91 minutes or more	18%	21
31-60 minutes	16%	19
61-90 minutes	11%	13
TOTAL		120

**Q22 Answer only if your child's IEP indicates a self-contained classroom and (otherwise, skip). My child's remote, self-contained classroom has a certified special education teacher and (if not a 12:1 or 15:1) a paraprofessional? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.**

Answered: 115 Skipped: 1,000

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	73%	84
Special education teacher and para, but not always present together	10%	12
There is a teacher, but that person is not a certified special education teacher.	10%	11
No	4%	5
My child's class is supposed to have a paraprofessional, but that person is not there.	3%	3
TOTAL		115

Questions 23-34 for students in FULLY REMOTE model.

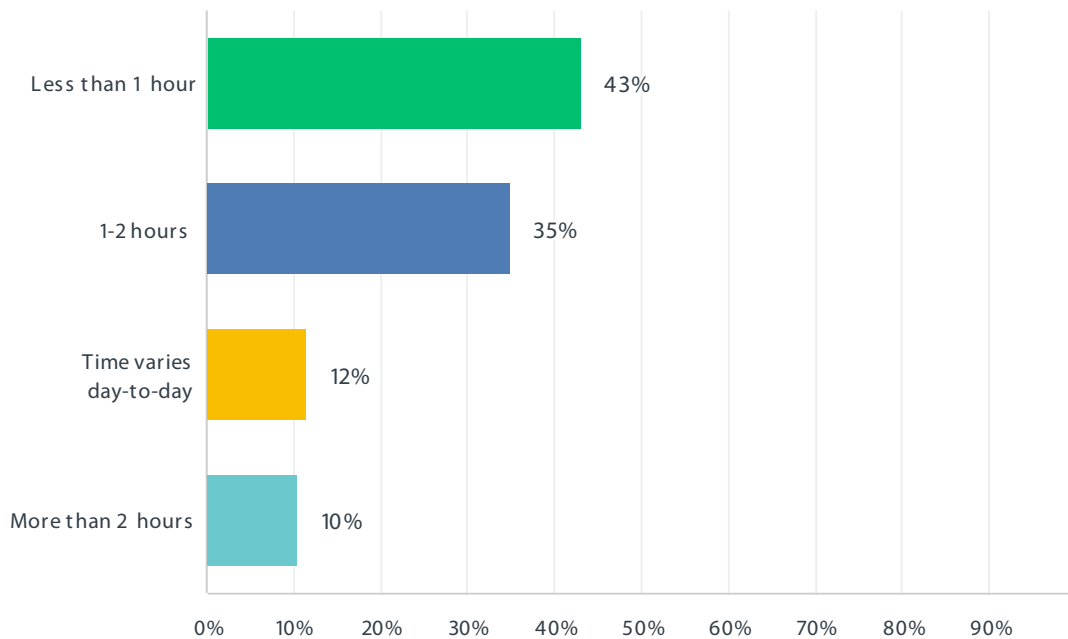
**Q23 As of this moment, do you know how many students are in your child's fully remote class? TIP: You can check your child's Google Classroom and count the number of students in a particular class.**

Answered: 363 Skipped: 752

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	78%	283
No	22%	80
TOTAL		363

**Q25 Which number range below indicates the average total minutes of live (synchronous) instruction your child receives per typical remote day:**

Answered: 364 Skipped: 751



**Q26 On an average day, are your child's teachers available to assist your child during independent classwork/ self-directed instruction in core subjects (ELA, Social Studies, Science and Math)?**

Answered: 363 Skipped: 752

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, the majority of my child's teachers are available during self-directed instruction.	31%	114
No, my child's teachers are not available during self-directed instruction.	26%	94
Some of my child's teachers are available during self-directed instruction.	23%	83
I'm not sure.	20%	72
TOTAL		363

## Q27 Did your teachers provide your child with a weekly schedule that details live instruction and self-directed learning periods?

Answered: 361 Skipped: 754

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	80%	287
No	20%	74
TOTAL		361

## Q28 In the fully remote model, the following statement best describes my child's experience:

Answered: 355 Skipped: 760

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
My child gets a just right amount of live instruction and self-directed learning.	33%	118
My child gets too much independent class work/self-directed learning.	28%	99
My child gets enough live instruction, but almost no breakout/small groups.	25%	88
My child gets too much live instruction with whole class.	13%	46
I don't know as my child has not begun fully remote learning.	1%	4
TOTAL		355

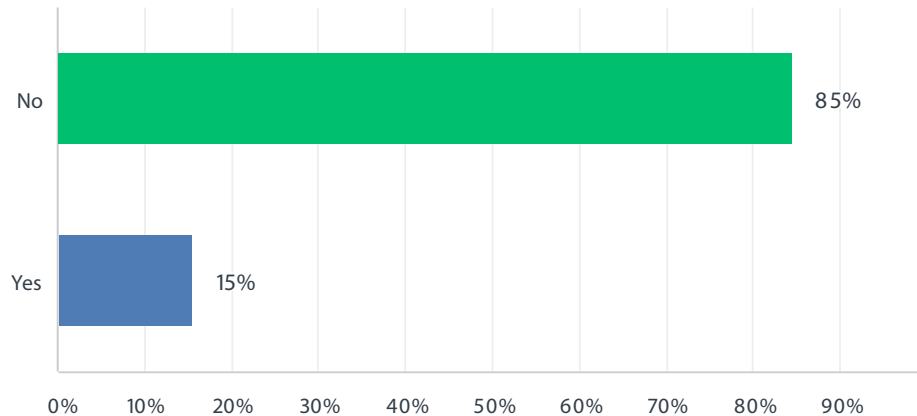
## Q29 Answer only if ICT is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise skip). For fully remote learning, does your child have 2 teachers - one general educator and one certified special educator in the virtual classroom for the majority of core subjects (ELA, Social Studies, Science, Math)? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.

Answered: 232 Skipped: 883

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	52%	121
No	39%	90
There are two teachers, but one is not a special educator.	9%	21
TOTAL		232

Q30 Answer only if ICT is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). Have you been notified that independent/not live (asynchronous) instruction counts toward your child's mandated ICT periods?

Answered: 214 Skipped: 901



Q31 Answer only if SETSS is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise skip). Are your child's remote SETSS provider(s) a certified special educator? TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.

Answered: 117 Skipped: 998

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	44%	51
I do not know.	41%	48
No	15%	18
TOTAL		117

Q32 Answer only if SETSS is listed on your child's IEP (otherwise, skip). Is your child is receiving all mandated SETSS periods?

Answered: 104 Skipped: 1,011

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	55%	57
Yes	45%	47
TOTAL		104



**Q33 Answer only if your child's IEP includes a full-time paraprofessional (otherwise, skip). How often does your child have access to his/her/their paraprofessional per day?**

Answered: 103 Skipped: 1,012

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
My child does not have access to his/her/their para on remote learning days.	29%	30
Less than 30 minutes	26%	27
31-60 minutes	17%	18
91 minutes or more	17%	18
61-90 minutes	10%	10
TOTAL		103

**Q34 Answer only if your child's IEP includes a self-contained classroom (otherwise, skip). My child's in-person, self-contained classroom has a certified special education teacher and a paraprofessional. TIP: Check whether a teacher is a certified special educator.**

Answered: 88 Skipped: 1,027

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	59%	52
I don't know.	14%	12
No	9%	8
There is a teacher, but that person is not a certified special education teacher.	9%	8
There is only a certified special education teacher and no paraprofessional.	9%	8
TOTAL		88

## Q35 Which of the following staffing-related issues have you experienced at your child's school? Check all that apply.

Answered: 439 Skipped: 676

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Related services (such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling or speech, etc) are scheduled during live teaching periods for core subjects (ELA, Math, Social, Studies, Science).	39%	173
My child's IEP mandates ICT, and theoretically, my child has two teachers per class, but only one teacher is available at any given time.	30%	132
Too many students in my child's class/classes, affecting my child's ability to learn.	29%	128
My child's IEP mandates ICT (integrated co-teaching), but no certified special educator has been identified to me, either for any subject or for a specific subject.	21%	91
At least one of my child's subject classes does not have any teachers right now.	13%	56
My child's access to a full-time paraprofessional was reduced.	12%	52
My child's IEP mandates SETSS periods, but no special education teacher has been identified, either for any subject or a specific subject.	7%	32
My child is expected to go to in-person Blended Learning, but will receive remote instruction at school because there is no teacher for the classroom.	5%	23
My child's SETSS hours at school have been reduced and no one has told me how to receive make-up SETSS hours afterschool.	5%	22
My child is in a specialized program and has a certified special educator who has not received ASD Nest or ASD Horizon training.	5%	21
My child is being taught, at least part of the time, by a paraprofessional instead of a certified special education teacher.	5%	21
Total Respondents: 439		

### Q37 Have you done any of the following to indicate your concern relating to issues from the previous question? Check all that apply.

Answered: 450   Skipped: 665

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Reached out to Teachers	71%	319
Reached out to Principal/Assistant Principal	47%	212
Nothing Yet	18%	83
Reached out to Specialized Program staff (i.e., ASD programs)	16%	72
Reached out to District Superintendent	9%	39
Emailed SpecialEducation@schools.nyc.gov	5%	22
Submitted a Due Process Hearing Request	2%	11
Reached out to Executive Superintendent	2%	9
Called P-311 (718-935-2007) and received a ticket number	2%	9
Filed a NY State complaint.	1%	6
Total Respondents: 450		

January 20, 2021  
NYC City Council Education Committee: Impact of COVID on Education

My name is Tamika Marcellin not only am I a founding parent with Uncommon Schools NYC for the last 12 years, but I have been working with Uncommon for the past 6 years as the Coordinator of Student Recruitment. My children Keisha and Taye were founding students at Leadership Prep Ocean Hill Elementary and Middle Schools and are now at Uncommon Leadership Charter High School as 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. I would like to share the impact of COVID-19 on education from the perspective of a parent and staff member.

As a parent although Uncommon has been able to provide my children with the technology and support they need to continue to learn during this pandemic my children still face the same challenges that so many children across the city are experiencing. Our Uncommon high school students were only able to have in person learning for less than 2 full weeks before all schools had to reclose due to the spike in COVID cases. We plan to reopen over the next few days and hopefully if the virus numbers stay low enough, we can remain open. Even with all of the support our children have been able to receive from Uncommon, this virus has prevented our children from having the full benefits of being in school with their teachers and peers enjoying their high school experience and blossoming into young adults. They are missing many things that they will also need to prepare them for college such as internships, application and financial aid prep, community service, sports and clubs to mention a few. In our community so many families have lost their jobs, their housing is in jeopardy and they are standing in lines to get food from schools and pantries. Worst of all many families have lost their loved ones and some of my children's friends no longer have parents. School is a place of comfort and refuge for so many children and we have to reopen them safely for **all children**.

As a staff member I know first-hand how hard all of our staff are working every day to deliver the high-quality education we promised to our students. This has been especially challenging because as charter schools we have been left to figure out how to provide devices, support, training, and remote education platforms to provide this education. From a health and safety standpoint we were also left out of testing and tracing as well as daily symptom tracking. Being left out of all of these critical components which enable us to educate and keep all children safe continues to add to the disparities in the black and brown communities that most charters serve. This is not a time for us to turn our backs on our schools, staff, and our children. As a parent and employee, we will have to figure out how to bounce back from the COVID slide ALL children will experience which I am sure will be much worse than summer slide could ever be. We will be recovering from this virus for many years to come.

I am sharing this with you because I would like City Council to support us as we move forward **TOGETHER** to recover. We have to do right by **ALL** of our children they are counting on us to make the right choices to protect them, keep them healthy, and ensure they have access to what they need to safely reach their full potential. School staff are on the front line risking their lives to work in schools and we must safeguard them just as we would any other essential worker. Let's unite and move forward together as only NYC can, I am hopeful that we can do with your leadership. Please reach out to me if necessary.

In solidarity,

Tamika Marcellin  
tmarcellin@uncommonschoools.org

Hello members of the City of New York, Council Committee on Education, my name is Nashabely Tejeda. I am in the 6th grade at Bedford Stuyvesant New Beginnings Charter School and I am 11 years old. I have been a member of the Student Government Association for 2 years and I would like to focus on the emotional impact COVID-19 has had on my learning and academic achievement.

Since 2020 entering 2021 stress has impacted my learning and academic achievement. I have had some down times when I feel like I couldn't do it anymore, even though I get told I can by my friends and family. I get very stressed with homework, class assignments and class time periods we have. Just sitting there all day is stressful! My school day looks like this. I wake up at 8:00 am. I do my daily routine and then get right on my computer to check any work that I have. I put my class on my device and officially start the day. Then around 9:00 am I start my classes. This is when I start to get a little headache since my screen is so bright. Then at lunch, if I have some work, I have to eat and do my work at the same time. Afterwards, I am in front of the computer until I am done. Most days that is 7:00 pm.

Generally, I would want to not have any more stress but sometimes it just takes my body longer to adjust. Stress has given me a negative impact. I absolutely think other students around the city are going through this too. At our school we came up with an idea to give a survey to see how stressed kids were on remote learning. Out of 177 students, most said they are very stressed! So this is honestly something a lot of students are definitely feeling!

Can this committee help? I think so! To help with the stress being generated schools need some more money to hire a full time therapist. I also believe that schools should get more money to enter some more workshops on how to relieve stress for some students like myself.

Thank you members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Nashabely Tejeda,  
BSNBCS, Class of 2023



January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Title: Access and Opportunity for Undocumented Students

New York City Council Committee Members on Education,

My name is Vanessa Luna, and I am the Co-Founder and Chief Program Officer of ImmSchools, an immigrant led nonprofit seeking to transform schools into safe and welcoming spaces for our undocumented and mixed status students and families. We work closely with educators, undocumented students and families in NYC public schools to ensure they have access to resources, supports and a safe space within our schools.

Over the course of this unprecedented school year, we have witnessed the tremendous work and commitment of our immigrant students, families as well as educators and school staff across New York City public schools. It is undeniable that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted our immigrant community in particular our undocumented immigrant students and families in our schools. The discrepancies that they had already experience in our schools have been exacerbated by this moment.

Through our efforts and the direct insight of undocumented students and families, ImmSchools recommends that the New York City Council:

- Urgently develop and implement a plan of academic support for immigrant students, that includes the undocumented students in our city's schools and their unique needs tied to immigration status
- Implement and fund a Communication plan that informs immigrant students and their families on opportunities, resources and supports during remote learning
- Offer grants to Community Based Organizations and schools who are well positioned to support our undocumented community in our schools and can provide additional capacity to support this unique population

In our efforts at ImmSchools, we have continuously witnessed undocumented parents do their very best to support students. Parents have had questions around how their status may impact their access to supports within schools and have a lack of understanding of their rights within our school system which have been constant concerns during this uncertain time. In addition, inconsistencies around language access have continued to occur during this moment- many families have cited lack of translated materials and remote spaces that do not account for multiple languages. This has all impacted student's ability to achieve in an already challenging remote contexts. Working with 10 high school undocumented students, we have witnessed their continuous commitment to career and educational opportunities beyond high school but a lack of understanding, resources and information on their post-secondary readiness. All of the students were unaware of college opportunities- including the NYS Dream Act, state and private financial assistance and questions related to their status. Many referred to the fact that they went to a very large school and could not receive one on one support or that they felt



unsafe sharing their status in a remote setting. One of our students shared being in a zoom classroom with over 50 students receiving college guidance and assistance- with little space to provide one on one support and to speak on sensitive topics such as immigration status in a more private and safe setting. In this large remote learning contexts, the resources and opportunities often provided were only for those who are citizens not for undocumented or students in different types of immigration status. This has left students to have to be extremely resilient and figure out their own pathways to success through family and community support in particular through CBOs. While our capacity has allowed us to support these students directly, we know there are thousands of undocumented students who do not have these types of supports and deserve an opportunity to achieve their goals regardless of immigration status.

These challenges have all been further impacted by the lack of support that our undocumented community has experienced from the federal, state and city as frontline workers. While these hardships continue, our immigrant community continue to seek out opportunities, resources, engage with their principals, superintendents, including participating or leading town halls and events in partnership with the district. As we look deeply into the how this pandemic continues to impact our schools, let us not forget the reality of our undocumented students and their families in our schools and ensure to include them and their families when we think about achieving educational equity in NYC public schools.

In partnership,

Vanessa Luna  
Co-Founder, Chief Program Officer  
ImmSchools



January 20, 2021

## **Testimony Presented to the New York City Council Education Committee**

Greetings, Chair Treyger and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. My name is Franklin Headley and I am the Founder and Principal of VOICE Charter School in Long Island City. We serve about 700 students from western and central Queens from Kindergarten through 8th grade. I would like to present some of the activities we have undertaken as a school to ensure the safety, health, academic and social-emotional development of our students since the pandemic began.

In early March of 2020, a few weeks before school buildings were officially closed, we began distributing thousands of pounds of food to our families and community neighbors. Since then we have provided an average of two tons of food per month through our community partners, the Hour Children Food Pantry and Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Community Settlement.

We launched our remote program the day after our buildings' closure in March. Thanks to our staff's outreach efforts and the distribution of hundreds of chromebooks and thousands of books from our library, every single VOICE student has been engaged in remote learning. As the families we serve live in some of the city's areas that were most severely impacted by COVID, our Social Work team has expanded their services to offer remote grief counseling, family outreach, advisory groups, and clubs to students and their families above and beyond their IEP-mandated counseling. Since the spring we have distributed thousands of care packages to families to support learning and health at home.

We have prioritized student engagement throughout our virtual program by simplifying processes and selecting high-interest content and activities. Our other priority is equity; we have structured our resources and curriculum to ensure that students who typically struggle with remote instruction (students with IEPs, English language learners, those without consistent supervision or access at home) receive as much extra support as possible. This summer, we renewed our commitments to anti-racism, partnering with equity consultants to implement audits, staff workshops, coaching, and strategic planning through this school year and beyond.



After the end of the 2019-20 year, we carefully examined our practices and student outcomes from the previous months of remote instruction in order to inform our plans for the current school year. Our process continued with numerous family and staff focus groups and school-wide surveys, soliciting feedback about student and parent engagement, feelings around health and safety, scheduling and childcare needs, student workloads, and technical support.

As we planned for this school year in July, we could foresee the possibility that our building would be repeatedly closed and re-opened, which would interfere with the continuity and structure that young children need. Finally, it became clear that the safe and more pedagogically sound choice was to allow our staff to focus on fully remote instruction, devoting themselves to learning the technology and best practices in the field rather than worrying about their personal safety.

For a number of families with urgent childcare needs and selected students who needed extra support during remote instruction, we decided to offer In-School Participation (ISP). Students in ISP participate in the same instruction as students offsite, but with supervision from adults in our building. As the areas we serve continue to experience high COVID transmission rates, our families and staff have appreciated our cautious, safety-first approach.

Rather than reducing our pedagogical staff to supervise students in the building for ISP, we decided to engage our long-standing community partner, Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House and their program staff to support students on-site. In doing so we are able to maximize VOICE staff time spent on one-on-one and small group instruction while engaging trusted youth service professionals from our community whose employment might otherwise be insecure. Because Riis also manages an afterschool program in our building, we have been able to provide 9.5 hours of continuous childcare daily for all families that request it as long as our co-located NYCDOE space has been open.

Since these major decisions around our fall plan, several aspects of our design have taken shape through data analysis and ongoing input from our community. A few examples include:

- Privileging social-emotional development, community building, and trauma-informed healing practices (and augmenting our Social Work and intervention staff)
- Especially in lower grades, beginning the year with intensive, age-appropriate courses on tech skills, self-advocacy, and executive functioning
- Weekly social-emotional, academic, and tech support check-ins for families

- Synchronous (live) instruction schedules that are staggered by grade band, allowing families with students in multiple grades to support virtual learning throughout the day
- Age-appropriate proportions of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, with longer synchronous sessions for Middle School students (as they requested)
- Chromebooks provided for each student participating in ISP in addition to one for each student learning at home (so students do not have to share or transport their devices)
- Funding for families and staff to optimize home teaching and learning spaces
- Wifi hotspots and other tech solutions for families and staff who need them
- Care packages sent to students' homes with key items to support literacy, math, and physical education
- Offers to reimburse staff expenses in tech and utilities, exercise gear, home office equipment, and bicycles
- Additional staff training in online platforms and virtual instruction and assessment

Thank you for your time.

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Good afternoon, my name is Jefferson Pestronk, and on behalf of New Visions for Public Schools, I thank the Chair Treyger and the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today. We have partnered with the Department of Education and public school stakeholders for more than thirty years. For the past seven years, we have built tools that help educators use data more effectively to support student success.

Improvement expert Tony Bryk has noted that it's difficult to sustainably improve what we do not measure. This is particularly challenging during this crisis when many traditional measures of student engagement are unavailable, but it is more critical than ever to support students.

We collaborate directly with schools to address challenges like this. Last spring, we worked with a small group of schools to understand how Google Classroom, which many schools were using to distribute and manage remote coursework, could help illuminate student engagement during remote learning. We identified key data points, like how frequently students were turning in assignments, that painted a richer picture than just remote attendance. Incorporating these data into the Portal by New Visions, a tool already available to every high school citywide, made it possible for schools to use a single tool to examine patterns of student engagement; identify which students are disengaging; understand why based in part on multiple factors, like whether students had access to remote learning devices or low pre-COVID attendance; and plan support.

We have since partnered with nearly 300 schools to integrate this data, directly responding to requests from school leaders. Schools that gained access to this actionable information increased their use of the Portal, and freed from the need to build their own tools, could focus on sustaining relationships with students and supporting their needs.

We are only beginning to understand the impact of COVID-19 on learning, but there will be much work ahead to support every student to regain lost ground. It will be more important than ever to empower educators with actionable data, and there is clearly demand for it. We look forward to continued partnership with students and families, educators, the DOE, and elected officials on this critical work.



**Testimony of Abe Fernández, Vice President of Collective Impact at Children's Aid  
Prepared for: Oversight Hearing on the Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning  
and Academic Achievement**

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

**Tuesday, January 20, 2021**

My name is Abe Fernández, and I am the Vice President of Collective Impact at Children's Aid and Director of the National Center for Community Schools. I would like to thank Chair Mark Treyger and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the impact of COVID-19 on student learning and academic achievement.

For 168 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. Our nearly 2,000 full and part time staff members empower about 50,000 children, through our network of 40 locations in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

Children's Aid facilitates learning opportunities that draw on our community schools practice for school and district leaders across the city, state, and country through the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS). Children's Aid created NCCS in 1994 to respond to the increased demand nationwide for information and advice about community schools implementation. Since its founding, NCCS has provided assistance to nearly all of the country's community school initiatives, and visitors from over 70 countries have visited Children's Aid's community schools to receive training from experts at NCCS.

In April 2020, after learning of the total elimination of all summer camps and summer jobs programs announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio, Children's Aid launched an effort that would later be called Recovery Lab – an initiative to mitigate the devastating effects we feared the mayor's decision would have on New York City's most vulnerable young people in summer and fall 2020.

Before COVID, numerous studies already showed the disruptive effects that just two months off from school in the summer typically has for many students, particularly low-income students – a phenomenon known as "summer learning loss" or "summer slide." National research indicates that the average student loses a month of academic calendar learning each summer, and the effects are more pronounced for low-income students.



Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1220 ♦ New York, NY 10115 ♦ 646-867-6660 ♦ [www.nccs.org](http://www.nccs.org)

Our grave concern, therefore, was the degree of setbacks too many students would face in the fall restart after six months or more of being remote and without opportunities for engaged learning and healthy social emotional development.

The goals of Recovery Lab were threefold:

1. address the immediate academic and social emotional needs of children and youth in New York City neighborhoods most affected by the global pandemic;
2. ensure students were prepared to transition to the 2020-2021 school year; and
3. identify and promote systemic changes that link academic success and social emotional well-being in how we serve young people going forward.

Two strategies comprised our approach:

- ♦ design a program model collaboratively with staff from dozens of community based organizations, and
- ♦ raise funding to restore as many summer slots as possible

More than 40 individuals representing 26 organizations from across the city served on planning groups we convened in June and July 2020, and we raised just over \$6 million from private sources that were disbursed via the Robin Hood Relief Fund to 29 organizations. These funded organizations served approximately 6,400 students spanning in age from pre-kindergarten to adolescence via programming that ran from the summer and into the fall, to support students through the transition to the pending school year.

We are now studying the lessons learned from these organizations' Recovery Lab programs and will release a full report of our findings and recommendations in March 2021. In the interim, I would like to share three of the major themes that are emerging:

- ♦ **Technology is both a barrier and bridge:** Too many participants struggled with access to devices and/or reliable Wi-Fi, making it near impossible for them to fully engage. This was especially true for students experiencing homelessness. At the same time, some providers reported having greater engagement and contact with students (and families in some cases) remotely as compared to in-person programming the year before.
- ♦ **Flexibility leads to innovation:** While Recovery Lab clearly articulated and emphasized the outcomes we were hoping to achieve, grantees were provided flexibility on how to design their programs. This freed them up to be more creative and responsive to the needs of their young people and families. This unusual level of flexibility even allowed some providers to serve populations not usually served in summer programming, such as undocumented students or out-of-school youth.
- ♦ **When the city stepped back, CBOs stepped up:** CBOs provided services to some constituents that the city was not able to provide, often going above and beyond their organizational capacity, including distributing food, conducting telehealth services, connecting to needs-based services, providing access to technology devices and broadband, and coaching families through navigating their schools' in-person or remote learning options.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the lessons we are learning via Recovery Lab – about collaborative planning with CBOs on program guidelines and shared outcomes, about the ways in which flexible funding and access to technology can promote high levels of engagement and unlock

innovation – that these are vital takeaways that should be integrated into the City’s approach. The opportunity to recover – to accelerate learning for children and youth – is here now. Our strong recommendation is that summer planning and decisions about investing in nonprofits for summer programming happen immediately – not when the school year is nearly over.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. I am happy to answer any questions you might have at [abef@childrensaidnyc.org](mailto:abef@childrensaidnyc.org) or 646-234-0337.