

**Testimony of NYC Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter
on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget
Before the NYC Committees on Finance and Education**

May 19, 2021

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Dromm, Chair Treyger, and all the members of the Finance and Education Committees here today. I am Meisha Porter, and I have the privilege of serving as New York City Schools Chancellor. Joining me today is Chief Financial Officer Lindsey Oates, Deputy Chancellor LaShawn Robinson, Deputy Chancellor Adrienne Austin, Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack, Chief Academic Officer Linda Chen, Chief Administrative Officer Lauren Siciliano, Chief School Operations Officer Kevin Moran, and other members of my leadership team.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Mayor de Blasio's Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget as it relates to the Department of Education. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge Chairs Dromm and Treyger as well as the entire City Council. During my brief time in this role, not only have the leaders on this Council welcomed me in a spirit of true collaboration but I continue to be struck by your thoughtful advocacy on behalf of our students and families. I am truly thankful for your partnership and leadership, especially during these challenging times.

Just over a year ago, a global pandemic began that completely transformed our city and our schools. Despite the countless challenges this crisis has presented, our commitment to our students, families, and staff across the city has remained steadfast. We have worked tirelessly to understand and address the needs of our students and families from the most basic to the most complex.

Since the city first shut down, it was our school system that stood up meal hubs to bring food to New Yorkers throughout the city. To this date we have served more than 100 million meals since the start of the pandemic. To address the digital divide, we have distributed almost 500,000 LTE-enabled iPads so that even our most vulnerable students could learn remotely.

Responding to the loss and trauma across our city, our schools have continued to expand social-emotional supports and trauma-informed practices. That has included professional development of staff and teachers as well as increased direct mental health supports in the communities hardest hit by the pandemic. We also worked tirelessly to provide in-person learning for more students than any other city in the nation by far. And, we made changes to our admissions process to double down on our commitment to equity and ensure our classrooms reflected the diversity of our city. These are just a few examples of the tremendous work accomplished across the city, and we all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our families, teachers, and staff. The resolve and resilience everyone has demonstrated have been nothing short of remarkable.

Now, with unprecedented investments from local, state, and federal government, we can deepen our commitments and effectively tackle the lasting impacts of the pandemic, especially the academic and social-emotional needs of all of our students who have gone through so much this past year.

As we look ahead, we know we cannot simply return to what our system looked like prior to the pandemic. It is imperative that we apply the lessons we learned during the crisis in the next school year. Our students need a school experience that is rooted in both healing and learning. More than ever, we need to connect to students in ways that recognize their own specific needs, experiences, and desires so that they can thrive.

To make that a reality, we are focused on providing vital resources to our schools, educators, and staff members to enable them to deliver the highest-quality instruction possible, in a supportive, enriching learning environment. As we emerge from this crisis, we have the opportunity to give birth to a school system in this city that accomplishes far more for our children and families than we ever imagined possible in the past.

Summer Rising

Every element of the Mayor’s Executive Budget is aimed at advancing that goal. So is our unprecedented **Summer Rising** effort, which will provide far more ambitious and expansive summer programming than in the past. This will be the first time we will serve any student in grades K-12 in July and August who wants to participate. In collaboration with the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD), we have reimagined what summer school can be along with partner community-based organizations that best know their neighborhoods.

After all the trauma and disruptions caused by the pandemic over the past 15 months, our children need a chance to reboot their education in fun and supportive ways as they approach the full reopening of our schools in September. Summer Rising is an opportunity for them to learn, grow, play, and explore the City around them – from field trips to Central Park and museums to dance and art classes.

The program sites are up and the applications are open now through DYCD’s website. After enduring months when so many of our students were isolated from each other and their teachers, the opportunity to rebuild those face-to-face relationships will do so much to begin their healing process and prepare them for returning to school full-time in the fall.

Executive Budget

So let me turn now to the details of the Mayor’s Executive Budget. As a result of the historic influx of funding to the city, the Budget provides crucial investments for our school system when we return next year and beyond. Many of these investments have been made with your invaluable input and advocacy. Our school system is fairer and more inclusive because of the efforts of this Council in collaboration with this administration.

The FY 2022 Executive Budget totals approximately \$37.7 billion, including \$31.4 billion in operating resources and another \$6.3 billion of education-related pension and debt service funds. Our funding is a combination of City, State, and Federal resources, with City tax levy money making up the largest share at 51 percent, State funds 34 percent, and Federal dollars 14 percent.

In the fall, as I have been saying since I started in March, we want to give every student the option to go back into school buildings five days a week. I want New Yorkers to know that our buildings are safe, and that our schools will be ready. As a parent, I know how challenging this decision can be and we are working hard to meaningfully engage with parents about school next year. This includes our five borough, family engagement tour that we started on Monday in Staten Island to hear directly from school communities about their experiences over the school year, help answer questions and gather feedback on the Executive Budget, and foster a discussion on school reopening for the fall. These family forums are critical to inform our plans for September and ensure our school communities are supported as we prepare for a strong reopening this fall.

Again, we know we are opening schools to a different reality than when we closed. We are coming back from what has been the hardest year of so many of our lives and I want to make sure that what we teach reflects students' lived experiences and needs given the difficulties of this past year. This budget aims to provide schools with the resources they need to address our new normal.

Simply put, this starts with more money going directly to our schools. As you know, thanks to stimulus funding and a long-awaited commitment from the State to fully fund Foundation Aid, I am so pleased to share with you some of the highlights of how we are investing in our students and our schools.

As a result of the Foundation Aid funding, we are able to provide **100 percent Fair Student Funding, or FSF**, to all schools. Over 1,000 schools and 700,000 students across every community school district will benefit from this investment, which will help ensure that every single school has what it needs to support students and staff during these challenging times. FSF is driven by equity and specifically provides more resources to schools that serve larger shares of students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and other needs. This is an incredible commitment and investment in our students, and it would not be a reality without the advocacy of so many – especially members of this City Council.

Along with fully funding FSF, the influx of essential stimulus resources will allow us to expand successful programs that have been proven to be effective, boost much needed services, and restore programs we know are valuable to our students. We want all our students to see themselves in their curriculum, their classrooms, and their schools. This means we will have a dual-pronged approach, addressing both social-emotional learning and academics.

To this end, the Mayor's Executive Budget includes historic investments in the **mental health and well-being** of our students that will build on our strong foundation of social-emotional learning and mental health supports that enabled us to respond to this crisis and the trauma it has caused. We will now add over 600 new social workers, school psychologists, and family support workers into our schools. As teachers and students come back together in September, many for the first time in 18 months, every single school will have access to mental health supports. We will also be providing trauma-informed care training to every early childhood staff member who works with students and parents.

Equally important, we are investing significantly in **academic support**. Given the system-wide academic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 that will be front and center next year, our plan for supporting

student learning is absolutely essential. This \$500 million investment starts with evaluating every student's needs through assessments. It includes accelerating learning for our students with additional learning time, focusing on Math and ELA, with a heightened focus on literacy. The investment will also be directed toward tutoring and more targeted support to our highest needs students including our students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners. High quality professional learning for educators will also be a critical component.

We know that providing a high-quality education to every New York City student depends on starting young. As part of this Executive Budget, we are strengthening our investment in early childhood education by adding \$377 million for **Universal 3-K for All** so that every single family in New York City can access a 3-K seat by September 2023. This builds upon our commitment to bring 3-K to every district by fall 2021 and means we will have 61,000 3-K seats all across New York City.

In addition, another \$22 million will expand the availability of **preschool special education** classes and support state-approved providers to ensure our early learners with special needs have access to the strong start and services they need and deserve. This investment will add 800 new seats across the city and ensure that our promise of Pre-K and 3-K for All reaches *every* student.

We know that while this pandemic has been trying for every student, it has had the most severe impact on our students with the greatest needs. To ensure our ability to provide critical programs and services to our students with disabilities, we are investing \$236 million next year to increase **special education services**. This funding will build on the progress we have made in strengthening delivery of related services and special education programs to students and families.

We are also growing our **Community School** strategy, which the RAND Corporation found to be effective in improving attendance and student outcomes, in order to bring Community Schools to every district by the 2022-23 school year. On top of the 27 previously announced new Community Schools, this funding will create 100 additional sites – bringing the total to 406.

Restorative justice has been a priority of this administration and of this council and has contributed to a 66 percent decrease in school suspensions. So the Budget will expand the availability of restorative justice programs in our middle and high schools. We are also thrilled to be expanding our **Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL)**, increasing access to sports programming across the city for high school students, focusing on schools with the greatest need.

We are also restoring investments we have made in **arts education** and the **Learning to Work** programming, which offers paid internships, student support services, in-depth job readiness, and college and career exploration activities for targeted high schools. All of these programs provide essential outlets and learning opportunities for our students.

Finally, this year has laid bare a lot of the inequities we have known existed across our city and schools, perhaps none more stark than access to **technology**. The pandemic forced us to harness technology to create a 21st-century learning experience for our students. While we are focused on returning all students

back in classrooms next year, we also know that we need to build on the technological capabilities we developed during the pandemic. So the Budget increases help desk support, continues LTE service for the next school year on the devices that we have already purchased, and builds out our digital learning hub. All of this will enable us to continue to integrate technology into the learning process for all of our students and more effectively prepare them for their future.

These initiatives all interconnect to our broad vision for remaking our schools as we emerge from the pandemic and into a critical recovery period.

Conclusion

The investments in the Mayor's Executive Budget reflect not only the needs of our students but also our vision and aspirations of where our school system needs to go as our city returns from this pandemic. After navigating through the countless challenges posed by the pandemic, we now have the opportunity and responsibility to elevate how we serve all of our students and families in ways far beyond what we imagined to be possible in the past. As we march toward fully reopening our schools in the fall, we look forward to celebrating not only the return of our students but also giving birth to an ambitious new era for education in our city.

I look forward to the continued, thoughtful feedback and advocacy of this City Council so that together we can provide all our students with the education they deserve.

Thank you for your time, and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



**Testimony of the New York City School Construction Authority
and the New York City Department of Education
on the Proposed FY 2022 Executive Capital Budget**

Before the New York City Council Committees on Education and Finance

May 19, 2021

Nina Kubota, President and CEO, New York City School Construction Authority

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Good morning Chairs Dromm and Treyger as well as members of the Finance and Education Committees. My name is Nina Kubota and I am President and CEO of the New York City School Construction Authority. It's my pleasure to join you today. I am joined by Karin Goldmark, Deputy Chancellor of the Division of School Planning and Development. We are pleased to be here today to discuss the February 2021 Proposed Amendment to the current FY2020–2024 Five-Year Capital Plan.

Since 2014, the SCA has created 51,540 new seats in fulfillment of the Mayor's commitment to reduce overcrowding and increase diversity including 10,973 seats as part of the Mayor's Pre-K and 3-K for All initiatives. We will continue to create seats in areas of current overcrowding and projected enrollment growth. In fact, we are currently in process on 20,676 of the 57,000 seats in this Plan, with another 5,500 seats in the pipeline. We are nearly halfway there only two years into the Plan.

And, in spite of the challenges we have faced during the current COVID-19 pandemic, we'll be opening eight new buildings and additions as well as three 3K centers for the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

Our success is due, in no small part, because of the partnerships we have built across the City, especially with the City Council, and the tireless dedication of the staff at the School Construction Authority who work to provide state-of-the-art schools for New York City's public school students. We are deeply appreciative of your strong support and generous funding of our schools. We are all working towards the same goals – to ensure our children have the best environment in which to learn. So far in this Plan, we have received over \$800 million allocated by the City Council, Borough Presidents, and other Mayoral/Council sources and again, thank you for your ongoing support.

FY 2020-2024 PROPOSED CAPITAL PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

The Proposed FY 2020-2024 Five-Year Capital Plan represents the administration's continued commitment to equity and excellence for all students, and builds on the foundation that we developed with the previous FY 2015-2019 Capital Plan.



Since the current FY2020-2024 Plan was adopted, the Plan has grown from \$17 billion to \$19.3 billion, an increase of \$2.3 billion. At \$19.3 billion, this is our largest-ever Capital Plan.

Here are a few highlights of our February 2021 Proposed Amendment to the Capital Plan:

- \$7.8 billion for over 57,000 new seats in fulfillment of the Mayor’s commitment to reduce overcrowding;
- Over \$1 billion for technology enhancements;
- \$750 million to make 50% of elementary school buildings partially or fully accessible, and 1/3 of all buildings fully accessible;
- \$589 million in support of the 3-K and Pre-K for All initiatives;
- \$276 million for electrical work to support air conditioning in all classrooms by the end of 2021; and
- \$84 million for improved ventilation.

The February 2021 Proposed Amendment to the FY 2020-2024 Plan has funding allocated in three overarching categories: our Capacity Program, totaling \$8.92 billion; the Capital Investments category, with \$6.72 billion allocated for work in existing buildings; and finally our Mandated Programs, at \$3.63 billion.

Capacity Program

The proposed amendment for the FY 2020-2024 Capital Plan includes \$8.92 billion for the capacity program, which consists of five categories: New Capacity, 3-K and Pre-Kindergarten Early Education, Class Size Reduction, Facility Replacement Program, and Capacity to Remove Transportable Classroom Units (TCUs).

Of the \$8.92 billion allocated to Capacity, \$7.80 billion will fund over 57,000 new seats in an estimated 93 buildings and will help us alleviate existing overcrowding and respond to ongoing pockets of growth in certain neighborhoods. In addition, we have secured opportunities to include new public school facilities across the City within several major, predominantly residential development projects undertaken by private developers in areas of existing or projected overcrowding.

Also included in our capacity program is \$589 million for the City’s 3-K and Pre-K for All initiatives.

In addition, \$140 million has been allocated to the Class Size Reduction program. This funding allows us to make significant strides towards reducing class size citywide, and further promotes quality and equity in our schools by addressing pockets of overcrowding through targeted investments.

\$180 million is allocated for the Capacity to Remove TCUs program which will allow for the construction of needed capacity, where necessary, in order to remove the remaining TCUs.



Lastly, \$217 million will fund the Facility Replacement Program for schools that must be relocated during this Plan. Funds in this category cover the costs to construct a new building or to build-out a new leased location.

Capital Investment

While creating seats is a key component of what we do, the Capital Investment portion of the Plan allows us to upgrade and make repairs to our existing facilities. As a reminder, 200 of our buildings are over 100 years old and the majority of our buildings are over 50 years old. The Plan directs a total of \$6.72 billion for capital investments in two main categories:

- \$3.11 billion for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which includes building upgrades and necessary capital repairs such as roof and façade work, structural repairs, and safeguarding our buildings against water infiltration; and
- \$2.80 billion for School Enhancement Projects, which funds the realignment of existing facilities to better suit instructional needs, bathroom upgrades, science labs, the Mayor’s Universal Physical Education Initiative, accessibility, and other necessary improvements.

Every year, we make progress on removing TCUs in use across the five boroughs. This Plan dedicates \$230 million in both CIP and Capacity dollars for the ongoing removal of these units. To date, we have removed 231 of the original 354 TCUs. Of the 123 remaining TCUs, we have plans in process to remove another 74 and we are developing plans to remove the final 49.

Other highlights in our capital investment category include:

- \$200 million for safety and security;
- \$119 million for specialty room upgrades;
- \$100 million for athletic field upgrades; and
- \$50 million for bathroom upgrades.

Mandated Programs

The Mandated Programs category, with \$3.63 billion allocated, includes approximately \$650 million for boiler conversions in buildings currently using Number 4 oil. The remaining funds are assigned to cover other required costs, including code and local law compliance, the SCA’s wrap-up insurance, and completion of projects from the prior Plan.

Executive Budget Additions

Since we appeared before the Education Committee in March, the Mayor has announced additional and significant investments in our City’s youngest learners. \$815 million has been added in the recent Executive Budget which includes the expansion of 3-K For All to every school district in the City as well as \$120 million to support the transfer of Early Learn to the DOE portfolio. We are working hand in hand with our partners at DOE’s Department of Early Childhood Education to bring these seats online over the coming school years.



The Mayor has committed to adding up to 16,500 more seats for three-year-olds, and by this fall, the City will provide approximately 40,000 3-K seats across all 32 school districts. And I speak for the entire SCA in saying we are incredibly excited to play a significant role in this expansion. Investing in and providing an early start to our youngest students is an important down payment in our next generation of leaders.

Public Engagement

Public feedback plays a crucial role in our capital planning process. Each year, we undertake a public review process with Community Education Councils (CECs), the City Council, other elected officials, and community groups. We offer every CEC in the City the opportunity to conduct a public hearing on the Plan, and we have attended hearings at every CEC. As you know, we also partner with individual Council Members and CECs to identify local needs.

Thank you again for your partnership and support. I will now turn it over to Deputy Chancellor Goldmark who will discuss additional aspects of the Plan.



**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education
and the New York City School Construction Authority
on the Proposed FY 2022 Executive Capital Budget
Before the New York City Council Committee on Finance and Education**

May 19, 2021

*Testimony of Karin Goldmark, Deputy Chancellor,
Division of School Planning and Development*

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairs Dromm, Treyger, and Rosenthal, and members of the Committees on Finance and Education. My name is Karin Goldmark, and I am Deputy Chancellor of the Division of School Planning and Development at the New York City Department of Education (DOE).

Before I begin, I first would like to thank Speaker Johnson, Chairs Dromm, Treyger, and Rosenthal, and the City Council for your continued leadership throughout this pandemic and all that you have done on behalf of New York City during this time. You remain fierce advocates for equity in our school communities, and we are grateful to have you working with the DOE on how best to serve all the students of New York City. Your insights and support have been crucial in the midst of this crisis as we pivoted to remote learning in our 1,600 school communities across the city last spring and then reopened school buildings this school year.

The Proposed February 2021 Plan continues to demonstrate the Administration's commitment to creating a safe and positive learning environment for all students and staff. We are proud to say that in a very short period of time, we made huge strides in closing the digital divide, making critical investments in technology, and improving ventilation and accessibility in our school buildings. The pandemic exposed existing inequities in the nation and our City, and we know these resources and upgrades have been central to moving our school communities forward and advancing our Equity and Excellence for All agenda. As we look forward to a full reopening in the fall, our returning students will be welcomed back to noticeably improved buildings.

The Plan was approved by the Panel for Educational Policy in April and will be considered for adoption by the City Council as part of the City's budget.

As you are aware, we testified before the Education Committee regarding the proposed February Amendment in March. While there are no changes from the proposed Plan we presented, I welcome the opportunity to revisit that testimony, particularly since members of the Finance Committee did not participate in that hearing.

TECHNOLOGY

The Proposed Amendment allocates \$1.02 billion for technology, which includes funding for Emergency Remote Learning student devices, increasing bandwidth in school buildings, and upgrades to classroom connectivity.

Since the start of the pandemic, ensuring that all students have access to remote learning devices has been a priority, and we have purchased over 500,000 LTE-enabled iPads to support students in need. Prioritizing equity, we started distributing centrally-purchased, internet-enabled devices to our most underserved students. We continue to fill device requests as we receive them from schools to ensure families have what they need to participate in remote learning.

We are grateful that the Council's longstanding and continuous investment in technology for our schools made it possible for the DOE to distribute devices to students since the onset of this crisis.

Another anchor of the plan is the \$750 million allocation towards improving school-based technology. Since 2015, the DOE has increased our overall internet bandwidth to 240G, across two major data centers, which allows schools to access faster connectivity. Previously the DOE had only 14G to share across all our schools.

This investment will also allow us to upgrade critical equipment like routers, switches, firewalls, and wireless access points in schools. Upgrading also ensures that the equipment has the latest security protections and controls in place.

VENTILATION

Health and safety have been at the center of every single decision connected to re-opening school buildings, and the science shows that our rigorous, multi-layered approach has made our schools the safest places in New York City. As part of this comprehensive effort, last summer we surveyed the ventilation in every building and have conducted extensive repairs in spaces that needed attention.

Following federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance for school operations on air ventilation to reduce the spread of COVID-19, every classroom was inspected by School Construction Authority-led teams of professional engineers. Repairs and remediation efforts were based directly on those assessments, including fixing windows and fan motors and cleaning air ducts. Out of the 64,550 classrooms across our system, over 99 percent are safely in use. We also identified and prepared alternative spaces for those schools that needed them, and we have made the clear commitment that any space that does not meet our ventilation standards will not be used.

In buildings with central HVAC systems, we replaced existing filter elements with new ones rated at MERV-13. The DOE has also purchased Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) monitors for CO₂ testing (as CO₂ is an indicator of adequate ventilation) and 137,000 High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) purifier units. These purifiers are certified to remove virus-sized particles from the air and are being used in all occupied classrooms, nurses' offices, and isolation rooms. We will continue to order more equipment as needed.

Relatedly, custodian engineers have been key contributors in ensuring that our students and school communities remain healthy and safe. DOE's Division of School Facilities reallocated building cleaning staff to ensure continuous daily touchpoint and whole-building overnight disinfection of all occupied school buildings. All buildings were provided with electrostatic sprayers to increase the efficiency of disinfecting labor tasks. In addition, all schools have had sufficient PPE and supplies to ensure safe operation for full in-person learning, which our Custodian Engineers manage for the entire building.

INNOVATIVE, DIVERSE, EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE SPACES

If the past year has taught us anything, it is that teaching and learning can blossom even in nontraditional spaces. As part of the Proposed Amendment, we are excited to launch the IDEAS initiative, which stands for Innovative, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible Spaces. This new IDEAS undertaking will foster the creation of dynamic and innovative learning spaces in ways that empower communities, respond to students' voices, encourage new partnerships, and advance diversity, integration, and inclusion. These efforts will further support the DOE's work to promote equity and excellence by providing access to 21st century learning opportunities to more students across New York City.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Proposed February Amendment continues to recognize the importance of ensuring access for all students and has emphasized accessibility as a major priority. As part of this Administration's Equity and Excellence for All Agenda, and as a direct result of support from the Council and our community partners, the Amendment continues to include \$750 million towards the critically important work of making our school buildings more accessible.

We greatly appreciate the Council's support in this area. Our team has been meeting with students, families, and community partners to ensure that we truly understand the needs of students and families and can make the necessary changes as quickly as possible. To drive this work forward, we established Offices of Accessibility Planning within DOE's Divisions of Space Management and School Facilities, as well as SCA. Working together, DOE and SCA have planned and approved 41 new accessibility projects in our historically underserved districts. We are committed to making a third of the buildings in every district fully accessible by 2024, and at least 50 percent of our buildings housing elementary school grades fully or partially accessible by 2024.



CONCLUSION

In a system this big, there will always be more work to be done. We will continue to update our Capital Plan in response to changing conditions and needs from our school communities, and we will seek your input in that process.

We are thankful again for your collaboration and generous support of capital projects now more than ever. Our students have been able to expand and improve their educational experiences because of these efforts, and we look forward to seeing our future students benefit as well.

We are proud that we were the only large school district in the country to safely re-open school buildings in the fall for in-person instruction and look forward to welcoming all families back this coming school year. It will be a time of renewal in spaces that will never be the same as they were before last March. The pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to all of us, but together we have stepped up and responded in extraordinary ways on behalf of our students and families that we can be proud of.

Thank you again for allowing us to testify today, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.