



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Finance

Re: Fiscal Year 2017 Executive Budget

May 24, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Fiscal Year 2017 Executive Budget. My name is Randi Levine and I am Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 40 years, AFC 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 are pleased that the Executive Budget includes increased funding for several important education initiatives, including an expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, which provide students with an important pathway to graduation, and improvements to SESIS, the DOE's special education tracking system, that are necessary to identify accurately which students with disabilities are and are not receiving the services to which they are entitled. I would like to use my limited time to focus today on a few issues that were not adequately addressed in the Executive Budget and that we urge you to prioritize as you negotiate the final budget.

Increase and Baseline Funding for DOE Social Workers for Students Living in Shelters

First, we ask you to work with the Administration to increase and baseline funding for DOE social workers for students living in shelters. Students living in shelters have far worse school outcomes than permanently housed students. Only 10% score proficiently in reading and math, and 28.3% need special education services. Students living in shelters are suspended at more than twice the rate of students living in permanent housing and are absent from school about one more month per year.

Currently, the DOE has fewer than 130 staff members dedicated to supporting students living in temporary housing, including 117 DOE Family Assistants who work in shelters and are primarily responsible for conducting intake with families and giving basic information about education. The Family Assistants are not required to

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have a college degree or any formal training in social work or education. They, therefore, lack the qualifications to provide all the support that this population needs. DOE social workers could have a significant impact in providing the counseling and advocacy needed to support school success for this population.

We thank Mayor de Blasio for including \$10.3 million in the Executive Budget to support students living in shelters. This funding includes \$3.6 million to hire 33 DOE social workers to work in the 43 schools with the highest populations of students living in shelters. Unfortunately, this funding is *one-year* funding that is not baselined. Furthermore, while hiring 33 DOE social workers is a positive step forward, more than *100 schools* serve a population in which more than *10 percent* of the students live in shelters.

We urge you to work with the Administration to ensure that the final budget includes funding to hire at least 66 DOE social workers to work with students living in shelters, at a cost of an additional \$3.6 million. This funding must be **baselined** to ensure continuity of this support.

Increase Funding for the City Council's Restorative Justice Initiative

Second, we urge the Council to increase funding for restorative justice. During the 2014-2015 school year, there were more than 44,000 suspensions from New York City schools, with a disproportionate number of suspensions imposed on students with disabilities and Black students. In order to give schools the support they need to address the underlying causes of suspensions and help students stay in school and develop the social-emotional skills they need to succeed, the City must increase investments in programs such as restorative practices.

We are grateful to the City Council for funding the restorative justice pilot program in the FY 2016 budget. For FY 2017, we are requesting \$5 million for this initiative. Of the \$5 million, \$2.4 million would support the continuation of the pilot program for the 15 schools selected to participate this year in order to sustain these efforts for a second year. An additional \$2.6 million would allow for additional schools to receive funding for a full-time school-based restorative justice coordinator, as well as provide schools with professional development designed to improve school climate and build capacity to implement restorative practices. **We urge you to include \$5 million in the final budget for the restorative justice initiative.**



Restore and Increase Funding for Summer Programs, After-School Programs, and Early Childhood Education

We also support the budget requests of the Campaign for Children including:

- Restoring and baselining funding (\$20.35 million) for summer programs for middle school students to prevent more than 31,000 children from losing the opportunity to participate in an educational, enriching, and safe program this summer.
- Restoring \$9.9 million for the 3,400 COMPASS elementary school after-school slots currently funded by the City Council.
- Expanding high-quality early childhood education programs for children ages zero to three.
- Encouraging the Administration to negotiate fair salaries for teachers and staff working in the City’s contracted early childhood education programs, given that their current salaries are substantially lower than staff with the same credentials in pre-K programs at public schools, and negotiating a final budget that includes sufficient funding for these salary increases so that the City can recruit and retain effective teachers for early childhood education programs.

We also note that we are deeply grateful for the City Council’s ongoing support of Advocates for Children’s Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline, which has allowed us to help thousands of families navigate the education system each year. We ask the Council to continue to fund this important program, as it provides assistance to parents who have nowhere else to turn.

We appreciate the City Council’s work to ensure that the budget invests in programs that help children get a high-quality education and look forward to working with the Administration and City Council as the budget process concludes. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions.