



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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

Re: Community Schools and Renewal Schools and Int. 262

February 27, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 45 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 work on behalf of children who are at greatest risk for school-based discrimination or academic failure due to poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile or criminal justice systems. Every year, we help thousands of individual families navigate the New York City school system.

We would like to start by congratulating Chair Treyger on his new leadership role, as well as the new and returning members of the Education Committee. We look forward to working with you over the next four years to strengthen education throughout the City.

AFC supports the growth of community schools and our Executive Director is proud to serve on the City's Community Schools Advisory Board. Many of the students and families we serve have needs that fall outside the scope of educational programs that schools have traditionally offered. Community schools help to connect students with the health, mental health, and social services they need to be successful learners, and they recognize the important connection between family involvement and student success. Community schools provide services to the students we serve in a variety of ways, including a pilot program that the Office of Community Schools launched in the community schools with the highest numbers of students in temporary housing to connect these students with mentors, attendance support, food and clothing, and social services. While it is critical for students and families to have access to the social services community schools provide, these services must go hand-in-hand with a focus on high-quality instruction and academic interventions to produce better educational outcomes for students. In addition, in the coming years, as the Administration continues its work on community schools, it will be important for the City to focus on how to sustain and expand this work so that more students will be able to benefit.

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Given our limited time today, I would like to make one key point about the renewal schools that are closing. Based on past experience, school closings can be detrimental to current students, decreasing stability and separating them from programs, services, and support they need. Our understanding is that the DOE has promised to work one-on-one with families to find new placements. The City Council can play an important role in monitoring what actually happens to students in closing schools and holding the City accountable for ensuring a thoughtful process for moving these students. Merely providing a student with a placement in a different school is insufficient. Rather, the DOE must provide schools that have the programs and services that students need. For example, if a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) mandates a 12-student special class, it is important that the DOE find a school that has a seat available in an appropriate 12-student special class and not assume that every school will be able to meet every student's IEP mandate. This is just one example; the need for a thoughtful placement process extends far beyond students with disabilities. We urge the Council to monitor this process and ensure that the DOE provides students who must leave their schools with new placements where they will have the greatest chance of school success based on their individual strengths and needs.

Finally, we support Int. 262, introduced by Council Member Richards, which would require the DOE's annual special education data report to include the number of students with IEPs in each school. We are glad to see this attention on special education so early in the new session. We also support a related bill, Int. 559, introduced by Chair Treyger, which would require the DOE to report on each school's compliance in providing students with their mandated special education services. This bill would help shine a light on schools that are succeeding in providing services to students with disabilities, as well as schools that need additional support and resources to meet the needs of students with IEPs, and would help us better target advocacy efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.