



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: Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Budget – Education (Expense)

March 23, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Budget. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 45 years, Advocates for Children has worked with the City's low-income families to ensure a high-quality education for children who face a variety of barriers to academic success. We speak out for students whose needs are often forgotten, such as students with disabilities, immigrant students, students who are homeless, and students with behavioral challenges.

We are pleased to see that the FY 19 Preliminary Budget continues expanding 3-K for All, expands the DOE's district-wide Restorative Practices model to three additional school districts, and continues the growth of important initiatives such as literacy coaches through the Literacy for All program.

With respect to areas where more funding is needed, I will focus today on school climate, support for students in temporary housing, and busing for students in foster care.

Evidence-Based Practices to Improve School Climate in High-Needs Schools

Every child deserves to attend a safe, high-quality school where students, teachers, and staff are treated with dignity and respect. Yet, we know from ample research and our work with numerous AFC clients that exclusionary, punitive discipline and school policing do nothing to create school environments that reduce violence in our communities and address the mental health and social-emotional needs of NYC students.

Although we have seen a positive decrease in the numbers of NYC student suspensions and school-based summonses and arrests, too many students are unnecessarily excluded from school instead of properly supported in school. And citywide data show that Black students and students with disabilities are still disproportionately impacted. Indeed, last year Black students comprised about 61.8% of students handcuffed by the NYPD during child in crisis interventions —incidents where the police became involved when a student showed signs of emotional distress

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and was then sent to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation. Schools desperately need more tools and resources to implement effective, systemic solutions for addressing the most challenging behaviors, or we may see a back-slide from the progress so far. Unfortunately, the FY 19 Preliminary Budget does not contain the funding needed for such solutions.

We recommend that the FY 19 Executive Budget include and baseline funding for the following recommendations of the Mayoral Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline:

1. Mental Health Support Continuum Pilot (\$2.875 million per year)

This pilot program uses a medical model to help ensure that students in 20 high-needs schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx have access to direct mental health services when needed. It would include school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics and call-in centers to assist schools with students in crisis, school response teams that help students get direct mental health services, school-based behavioral health consultants, whole-school training in the evidence-based model of Collaborative Problem Solving, and program evaluation.

2. Whole-School Collaborative Problem Solving (\$1 million per year)

Collaborative Problem Solving (“CPS”) is an evidence-based model that has demonstrated effectiveness with children and adolescents who have a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Use of CPS helps schools move away from an exclusionary, punitive model to a problem-solving, skill building approach in which students take responsibility for long-term behavioral change in an environment where the adults are trained to support them. This funding would allow the City to systematically implement CPS in 25 high-needs schools and develop a cadre of CPS-Certified Trainers to build capacity by training other schools in this evidence-based approach to transforming school climate and discipline to keep students and staff safe.

In our written testimony, we have attached a letter from fifteen organizations – comprised of students, parents, educators, mental health providers, and advocates – supporting these recommendations and providing additional detail on each of these proposed investments.

We also recommend that the FY 2019 Budget include \$2.6 million to continue the City Council Restorative Justice Program pilot in 25 schools. The Administration and City Council split the \$2.6M cost in FY 18, but the FY 19 Preliminary Budget does not include any funding for this program. In addition, we support the \$3 million



included in the FY 19 Preliminary Budget to expand the DOE’s Restorative Practices whole-district model to three additional school districts.

Students in Temporary Housing

In 2016-2017, a record 104,088 students in NYC district schools were identified as homeless—a 50 percent increase from just five years ago. In FY 17 and FY 18, the Administration included \$10.3 million in the budget to support students who are homeless, including after-school literacy programs at shelters and 43 DOE “Bridging the Gap” social workers to work with students living in shelters at schools with high populations of these students. These social workers have provided counseling to students to address the trauma often associated with housing loss, connected them to academic support and mental health services, and worked to improve attendance. For example, at one school, the Bridging the Gap social worker worked tirelessly with a family and shelter staff to ensure the consistent attendance of a group of siblings living in shelter who had missed more than 60 days of school at their previous school. Only after the Bridging the Gap social worker’s intervention did the siblings begin regularly attending school.

Given this success, we were dismayed to see that the FY 19 Preliminary Budget does not include any funding to continue this initiative. When asked about this omission, Mayor de Blasio stated that he was still assessing what type of support and how much funding to include in the Executive Budget.

Given the number of students in temporary housing and the barriers they face to school success, we recommend that the FY 19 budget **restore and baseline the \$10.3M** and **add and baseline an additional \$20M** for the following initiatives:

1. Establishing a Deputy Chancellor’s Office for Highly Mobile Students (including students in temporary housing and students in foster care) (\$1M)
2. Hiring Field Support Center Directors for Highly Mobile Students (\$4.5M)
3. Increasing the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 43 to 100 (\$8M)
4. Hiring 50 DOE social workers to provide intensive supports at shelters to address education-related issues (\$6.5M)

In our written testimony, we have attached a publication released last week by AFC and Citizens’ Committee for Children with details about these recommendations, as well as a letter from 16 child advocacy, education, and housing organizations supporting these recommendations.



No child in New York City should be homeless. But while the City works to address the overwhelming problem of homelessness, the City must do more to mitigate the impact of homelessness on children, ensuring they get to school on a regular basis and get the academic and social-emotional support they need to succeed in school. If we want to break the cycle of homelessness, the City must focus more attention and resources on the education of students in temporary housing.

We recommend that the Executive Budget include \$30.3 million to support the high-level leadership and DOE social workers at schools and shelters needed to drive and manage system-wide change for these students.

Busing for Students in Foster Care

When students are removed from their homes and families and placed into foster care, school is often the only source of stability in their lives. However, 3 out of 10 students in NYC have to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care—often because they have no way to get to their original school. In our experience, this number is even higher for younger students who cannot take public transportation on their own to get to school.

The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) require the DOE and ACS to provide, arrange, and fund transportation so that students can remain in their original school when they enter foster care, unless it is in their best interests to transfer to a new school. However, the City does not guarantee bus service to students in foster care. The City only provides bus service to students in foster care whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) require special transportation and those who may be easily added to existing bus routes. As a result, students who cannot travel to school on their own are often forced to transfer schools.

Having to transfer schools mid-year means that students must adjust to unfamiliar peers, teachers, routines, and curriculum, while experiencing the trauma of being separated from their parents, and sometimes from their siblings and communities as well. Research shows that students who change schools frequently have lower test scores, earn fewer credits, are more likely to be retained, and are less likely to complete high school than students whose school placements are stable.

The City has already extended yellow bus service to more than 5,000 kindergarten through sixth grade students living in shelters, paving the way for the City to provide yellow bus service to the significantly smaller number of kindergarten through sixth



grade students in foster care who may need bus service and currently cannot access it. No student in foster care should be forced to change schools due to lack of transportation. We recommend that the FY 19 Executive Budget include \$5 million for bus service for kindergarten through sixth grade students in foster care.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We look forward to working with the Administration and the City Council as the budget process moves forward. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.