



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 Youth Services

Re: Universal After-School Program Plan Int. 1100-2018, Int. 1113-2018

January 14, 2020

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Thank you for the opportunity to discuss how New York City can create a plan for universal after-school programming. My name is Janyll Canals, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). 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.

Through our work with families across the City, we see the need for universal after-school programming, especially for families with limited financial means. After-school programs help improve children's development, safety, and academic performance. Such programs allow children and youth to engage in academic and developmental enrichment activities in a safe environment after the school bell rings. Therefore, we support Int. 1100-2018 and Int. 1113-2018. As the City Council advances these bills, we would like to make a few recommendations to help ensure that universal after-school programming is accessible to students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care.

Although after-school programs must serve students with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations for students to participate, we have heard from families that programs are not always able to meet the needs of these children. For example, one parent contacted AFC after her child's after-school program requested that she pick up her child early everyday due to behaviors related to the child's disability, putting the parent's employment at risk. A plan to create universal after-school programming must ensure that all children can benefit from such programming, including children with disabilities. We recommend adding a provision to Int. 1113-2018 requiring the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to report on the process for students and families to request reasonable accommodations and special education supports to enable



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students with disabilities to participate in after-school programs and the number of requests for accommodations fulfilled, as well as the steps the agencies have taken to better support after-school programs in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Another barrier we often see with after-school programming is transportation. For students in temporary housing and foster care and students with disabilities, the DOE only provides door-to-door bus transportation to a student's residence at the end of the school day. If a child would like to participate in any after-school programming, the parent must either pick up their child or pay for alternate transportation. This policy significantly limits access to these programs for many students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and students with disabilities as they rely on DOE transportation to get home from school. Given this significant obstacle, we recommend adding a provision to Int. 1113-2018 requiring the DOE and DYCD to report on their efforts to address the barrier of lack of transportation, including efforts to expand door-to-door bus transportation or a comparable alternative mode of transportation to help students who qualify for school-day door-to-door transportation access after-school programs.

Finally, as the City moves toward universal after-school programming, it is important to examine which students are and are not being served. We appreciate that Int. 1100-2018 and Int. 1113-2018 both require reporting on participation by students with disabilities and English Language Learners. We recommend adding reporting on participation by students living in shelters, students in temporary housing other than shelters, and students in foster care as these students often face barriers to participation in after-school programs.

We thank the City Council for its leadership on these bills and look forward to working with the City Council to move them forward.

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