



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 and Committee on General Welfare

Re: Youth in Shelter and the School System

April 16, 2021

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York. For 50 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 are proud to house NYS-TEACHS, the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, which works on several thousand cases each year regarding the educational needs of students in temporary housing in New York.

Despite the hard work of many educators and DOE staff members, including the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Office, the pandemic has worsened the inequities that have long existed for students in shelter. Over the course of the pandemic, we have heard from families in shelter about students having to wait months to receive an iPad; students whose iPads did not work properly due to lack of Wi-Fi and adequate cellular reception in shelter units; students who had difficulty focusing on schoolwork while trying to complete assignments in small rooms that they shared with their parents and multiple siblings of varying ages, grade levels, and needs; and students whose instruction or special education services were not effective over a screen.

In January 2021, the only month for which the DOE has released disaggregated attendance data this school year, students living in shelter had by far the lowest attendance rate of any student group: 75.7%, 15.1 percentage points lower than the rate for their permanently-housed peers, with even lower attendance rates at the high school level. Tenth graders in shelter had an attendance rate of just 64%, meaning they missed one out of every three school days. We continue to call on the City to use attendance data to reach out to all families of students in shelter who have not been regularly engaging in remote learning and identify and resolve the barriers that are keeping them from participating in school.

Given the significant systemic roadblocks students in shelter faced during the pandemic, the City should keep the needs of students in shelter front and center as it decides how to use the billions of dollars of COVID-19 education relief funding it is



receiving from the federal government. A number of the recommendations in the City Council’s response to the preliminary budget – such as summer programming, small group tutoring, evidence-based literacy curriculum, compensatory services for students with disabilities, and social workers – will be critical for students in shelter. But, as we saw in the case of iPads, merely offering resources to all students, or even giving students in shelter priority for resources, is not sufficient to ensure students in shelter have meaningful access. Rather, to ensure students in shelter can access supports, the City needs an intentional, targeted plan. For example, when it comes to the City’s new Summer Rising program and any other supplemental programming, such as tutoring, that will be offered next year, the City should:

- conduct intensive, strengths-based outreach to ensure families in shelter know about the services and get support signing up;
- listen and respond to any concerns parents in shelter may have and connect them with other professionals who can provide additional information as requested;
- provide door-to-door transportation for all services including any that take place outside regular school hours;
- provide summer services and tutoring on site at shelters that have space available; and
- ensure that there is a remote option with sufficient support for families, including IT support, language access, and accommodations for students with disabilities.

Some of this intentional planning will require targeting resources specifically to students in shelter, especially at a time when the DOE will be receiving more than \$6 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding. For example, AFC has recommended that the DOE hire a corps of professionals to focus on outreach and engagement. Given the number of students in shelter who have not been regularly attending school, the DOE should include as part of this corps at least 150 shelter-based community coordinators to focus specifically on helping students in shelter connect with school and access any supplemental programming, services, and supports the DOE will be offering.

With respect to Intro. 150-2018, we support this bill, which would establish a task force on transportation for students who are homeless. We appreciate that, more than five years ago, Mayor de Blasio announced that the City would guarantee bus service for all kindergarten through sixth grade students living in shelters and that the DOE codified this policy in Chancellor’s Regulations. This landmark change has provided an important protection for thousands of students living in shelter, helping ensure they have regular and consistent access to school. However, we continue to see challenges around school transportation for students living in shelters, including



transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters, transportation during conditional shelter placements, transportation for 3-K and pre-K students living in shelter, and transportation for students living in shelter who wish to participate in after-school or summer programs. A task force can help address these issues. To make the bill as effective as possible, we recommend specifying in the bill some of the topics that the task force should address. We are attaching a mark-up of the bill with our suggestions.

We want to thank the City Council – and especially Chairs Levin and Treyger – for the leadership you have shown in standing up for students in shelter, drawing attention to their needs, and fighting for targeted resources such as Bridging the Gap social workers. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure students in shelter can participate in school and get the academic and social-emotional support they need after the disruption and devastation of the past year.

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

Recommendations from Advocates for Children of New York re: Int. No. 150

Int. No. 150

A Local Law in relation to a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. a. Definitions. For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

Family assistant. The term “family assistant” means department of education staff assigned to work with shelters and schools to assist homeless families with obtaining transportation assistance and other services for which they are eligible.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means temporary emergency housing provided to homeless individuals and families by the department of homeless services, the department of social services, the human resources administration, the department of housing preservation and development, or a provider under contract or similar agreement with such departments.

b. There shall be a task force regarding the transportation of homeless students consisting of at least ~~ninenineteen~~ members. Members of the task force shall be appointed by the mayor after consultation with the speaker of the council. Such task force shall include the following members:

1. the deputy chancellor for school climate and wellness of the city school district, or their designee, who shall serve as chair;

2. the administrator of the department ~~commissioner~~ of homeless services, or their designee, ~~who shall serve as chair;~~

23. the commissioner of the department of social services, or their designee;

~~the deputy chancellor for operations of the city school district, or their designee;~~

4. the executive director of the office of pupil transportation of the city school district, or their designee;

5. the executive director of the office of domestic violence and emergency intervention services of the human resources administration, or their designee;

6. the commissioner of the department of housing preservation and development, or their designee;

7. the chairperson of the city council committee on general welfare, or their designee, and the chairperson of the city council committee on education, or their designee;

8. 4. at least two family assistants and at least one ~~content expert~~ regional manager from the students in temporary housing office of the city school district;

9. at least two representatives of organizations which provide shelter for families with children; and

10. at least two representatives of advocacy organizations with relevant expertise;

11. at least two representatives of ~~a~~ companies which provide busing services to students;
and

12. at least two parents of students who are currently or were formerly living in shelter.

c. All members of the task force shall serve without compensation and at the pleasure of the mayor. Any vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment. All members shall be appointed within 60 days of the enactment of this local law.

d. The task force shall meet at least quarterly and shall submit a report of its recommendations to the mayor and the speaker of the council no later than 12 months after the final member of the task force is appointed. Such report shall include an assessment of the barriers

to arranging transportation, including bus service, MetroCards, and other forms of transportation, for students living in shelter and recommendations for addressing such barriers. The topics covered by the report shall include, but not be limited, to the following topics:

1. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation during conditional shelter placements;

2. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students found eligible for shelter;

3. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students transitioning from shelter to permanent housing for the remainder of the school year;

4. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation, including prompt provision of public transit passes for systems outside of New York City, for students who are temporarily residing outside of New York City or for students who were homeless, have secured permanent housing outside of New York City, and continue enrollment in New York City for the remainder of the school year;

5. interagency protocols to ensure reimbursement for transportation expenses when transportation has not been promptly arranged for students in temporary housing;

6. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in domestic violence shelters that ensure the safety of such students and that confidential information is not improperly disclosed;

7. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelter who are enrolled in 3-K, Pre-K, Head Start, preschool special education classes, or preschool special classes in integrated settings, and for preschool students with disabilities living

in shelter receiving related services when related services are provided at a related services agency outside the home or preschool setting; and

85. interagency protocols to ensure the prompt provision of transportation for students living in shelters so that they may participate in extracurricular activities, including COMPASS and other after-school and summer programs.

e. Annual reports on the implementation of such recommendations shall be submitted to the mayor and the council no later than 12 and 24 months following the submission of the initial report, after which the task force will cease to exist.~~The task force shall cease to exist upon the publication of the report required pursuant to subdivision d.~~

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.