



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn since 1971

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

Re: Fiscal 2023 DOE School Budgets

June 24, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about school budget cuts. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at 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 focus on students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless or in foster care, and students with involvement in the juvenile or criminal legal systems. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate New York City's school system.

When we testified before the City Council at the preliminary and executive budget hearings, we made clear that the City should reject the Mayor's proposed cuts to education and should make key investments to better support the students we serve. While we are pleased that the adopted budget includes funding for several important education investments such as the Mental Health Continuum, immigrant family communication, shelter-based community coordinators, and early childhood education for children who are undocumented, we are deeply concerned that the budget continues to cut school budgets.

Taking into account the register relief funding that schools are receiving, more than 400 schools, serving a total of 186,000 students, are seeing cuts of over 10% to their Fair Student Funding allocation. At 189 of those schools, more than 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public benefits. We regularly hear from families, including families of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, whose children are not getting the instruction they need and have a legal right to receive, much less the support they need to thrive. In fact, according to DOE data, as of November 2021, more than 31,000 students with disabilities were not fully receiving their mandated special education instruction. We are very concerned about the impact school budget cuts will have on all students and especially on the students with the greatest needs.

These cuts come at a time when our City is grappling with the unprecedented educational disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also at a time when the DOE has received \$7 billion in federal COVID-19 stimulus relief funding. While

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much of the funding was allocated to important programs and services such as make-up special education services and school social workers, hundreds of millions of dollars were allocated to broad categories such as “programmatically support” and “operational support.” The Council should examine where every dollar is going, determine how much stimulus funding has been spent so far, and identify how much funding is still available to prevent schools from having to make cuts.

The City should also reexamine the Fair Student Funding formula that is driving these school budget cuts. As a member of the City’s Fair Student Funding task force under the previous Administration, I know there are major questions about the equity and adequacy of this formula that need to be examined and addressed. We join our partners in calling for a funded, independent commission that can assess ways to allocate school funding equitably and ensure schools have the resources they need to serve all students.

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