



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

Re: School Budget Cuts

August 22, 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.

We are deeply concerned about the cuts to school budgets. Taking into account the federal register relief funding that schools received last year and are receiving this year, more than 400 schools, serving more than 200,000 students, are seeing cuts of over 10% to their Fair Student Funding allocation. At more than 200 of those schools, more than 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public benefits. More than 800 schools, serving more than 430,000 students, are experiencing cuts of over 5% to their Fair Student Funding allocation, with an average cut of \$518,000. At nearly 350 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.

We call on the City to restore funding for school budgets. 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. Students should not need to lose teachers or programs at a time when the DOE has received this historic level of funding. As the City Council negotiates with the Mayor, we want to ensure that schools do not experience unnecessary cuts, that investments for students with high needs included

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in the FY 23 budget – including shelter-based community coordinators, the Mental Health Continuum, and immigrant family communication – remain intact, and that federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated to important purposes such as special education services and restorative justice that went unspent in FY 22, as well as funding allocated to these purposes for FY 23, gets used as intended and does not get diverted.

Finally, we want to emphasize the importance of thinking ahead about the DOE budget – from the need to reexamine the Fair Student Funding formula to the need to sustain important programs, ranging from social workers to preschool special education initiatives, currently being funded through time-limited federal relief funding.

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