



# 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: FY 24 Preliminary Budget - Education

March 15, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the 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. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the school system. 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, students with mental health needs, and students with involvement in the juvenile or criminal legal systems.

At a time when New York City is receiving increased education funding from the State and continues to have unspent federal relief funding, schools should receive additional resources to meet students' needs—and certainly should not *lose* funding.

We are concerned that the following three programs were left out of the FY 24 preliminary budget. The Council was instrumental last year in securing funding for these programs that will expire in June unless extended in the FY 24 budget:

- **\$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum**, the first-ever cross-agency partnership between DOE, H+H, and DOHMH to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare.
- **\$4 million to help immigrant families get needed school-related information** through strategies such as sending paper notices, calling and texting families, and collaborating with immigrant-facing CBOs on information campaigns.
- **\$3.3 million for shelter-based community coordinators** to help students who are homeless get to school and get needed educational support.

With the youth mental health crisis and the increase in newly arrived students living in shelter, this is not the time to jeopardize funding for these important programs.

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The City should also address critical needs by making increased investments:

- **\$25 million to support 250 schools in transitioning to culturally responsive and effective reading instruction and intervention** at a time when only 36% of Black and Hispanic students, and 18% of students with disabilities, are reading proficiently.
- **\$3 million to bolster the six new English Language Learner transfer school programs**, ensuring they have the bilingual social workers, staff training, and wrap-around services to support recently arrived older ELLs.
- **\$120 million to expand schoolwide restorative justice practices to 500 schools** to reduce the use of suspensions and instead address students' underlying needs and keep them in school.
- **\$5 million to guarantee bus service for students in foster care** so students are not forced to transfer schools when they are removed from their homes and families.
- **\$50 million to provide evaluations and services to preschoolers with disabilities** given that more than 7,000 preschoolers went the entire year without receiving at least one of their mandated services.

Elected leaders must also start planning now for the expiration of the federal COVID-19 relief funding, which the City is currently using to fund a wide range of education programs that need to be sustained.

Our written testimony has more information about each of these priorities. We look forward to working with you. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.