



# 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 Finance

#### Re: November Financial Plan

December 11, 2023

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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.

As an organization that works every day with families of students who face some of the biggest barriers to educational success – students with disabilities, immigrant students, students who are homeless or in foster care, among others – we are deeply concerned about the impact of the \$547 million cut to New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) this year – and the more than \$600 million cut next year.

In addition to concerns about cuts to programs like community schools and 3-K, we are already seeing the impact of the hiring freeze and vacancy reduction. While central staff is needed to operate the school system for *all students*, staff working outside of schools are particularly important to support students with the greatest needs. Cutting hundreds of NYCPS staff members means it takes longer for immigrant students to get a school placement, for students who are homeless to get a bus route, and for students with disabilities to get services. As just one example, we have had calls about families of preschoolers in the Bronx who cannot get services because the blanket hiring freeze has left the Committee on Preschool Special Education short-staffed. The City has legal obligations to these students that cannot be ignored.

It is important to note that, in addition to the cuts listed in the November Financial Plan, there is a slew of additional education programs on the chopping block. Over the last few years, NYCPS has been using around \$1 billion per year in temporary federal COVID-19 relief funds for important long-term programs that were necessary



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long before the pandemic and will continue to be needed long after, such as 3-K, preschool special education, Summer Rising, 450 school social workers, community schools, school nurses, restorative justice, 60 school psychologists, 75 coordinators working in homeless shelters, bilingual staff, translation and interpretation, dyslexia and literacy initiatives, and more. While the federal funding will run out in June, the need for these supports will continue. More information about each of these programs and the amount of temporary federal funding currently being used for each one is available in the call-to-action signed by more than 160 organizations available at <https://bit.ly/NYCCTA>. In addition, the immigrant family communication and outreach program, the Mental Health Continuum, an additional 25 shelter-based coordinators, Promise NYC (providing child care to children who are undocumented), and additional community schools are funded with one-year city funding slated to end in June as well. Unless elected officials act, we are at risk of seeing cuts to each of these programs—cuts that are *on top of* the cuts laid out in the November Plan. We need the Council's leadership – in Albany and in City Hall – to ensure these programs continue.

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