



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## Response to Governor Hochul's State of the State Address

**January 9, 2024 (NEW YORK CITY)** — *In response to Governor Hochul's State of the State address, Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement:*

Teaching children how to read is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of our schools. For too long, we have heard from families whose children did not receive effective literacy instruction and were struggling to read. We routinely work with middle and high school students who are unable to read their school textbooks or complete job applications—not because they lack the motivation or cognitive capacity to learn to read, but because their schools failed to provide evidence-based instruction and intervention.

Ensuring that school districts across the State use curricula aligned with the scientific evidence on reading development and provide teachers with training and support can have a significant impact if implemented well. We're encouraged that Governor Hochul has identified literacy as a priority and is taking these steps forward, and we look forward to seeing more details.

We also agree with Governor Hochul about the importance of addressing students' mental health needs, particularly as we've seen these needs grow since the pandemic. We appreciate the Governor's attention on this issue, including proposals to support expansion of school-based mental health clinics, which can be a vital resource for students requiring mental health services.

Moving toward effective reading practices and expanding access to mental healthcare would move our schools forward in important ways, but we are concerned the State may take a big step *backwards* if the Governor and Legislature do not intervene to support school districts that have funded essential programs, including programs advancing literacy and mental health, with soon-to-expire federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars. While some of the funding went to temporary needs caused by the pandemic, school districts also invested this money in programs that addressed long-term needs – needs that existed before the pandemic and are not going away. New York City alone is spending around \$1 billion per year in expiring funding to pay for

450 school social workers, 3-K expansion, legally mandated preschool special education programs, shelter-based community coordinators, Summer Rising, community schools, psychologists, bilingual programming, literacy initiatives, and more.

This fall, more than [160 organizations issued a call-to-action](#) noting: “We are at a critical juncture. Our elected leaders must choose between allowing these programs to end on their watch—dealing a massive setback to public education—or taking action to identify new funding sources so students can continue receiving critical supports and services. We are counting on our elected leaders to sustain essential education programs and build on the progress made, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of students for years to come.”

While we appreciate that the State is fully funding the decade-old Foundation Aid Formula, this is no time to be complacent. Instead, Governor Hochul and the State Legislature must make a substantial investment to help school districts sustain important education programs as their federal stimulus funding expires.

#### **About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)**

*Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York 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 who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.*