



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

COVID-19 EDUCATION RECOVERY

Over the past year, the pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to the education of children and youth—and the students hit hardest have been those who were already struggling in school or marginalized on the basis of race, poverty, disability, immigration status, English proficiency, homelessness, or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile or criminal justice systems.

New York City needs an ambitious Education Recovery Plan to pave the way to hope and opportunity for this generation of students. Such a plan must invest resources in academic support, mental health support, and outreach and engagement. It must be targeted to assist students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including the provision of specialized instruction and support where needed.

With the federal government having approved the largest one-time investment in education in our nation's history, planning must happen now if we are to make the best use of the resources coming our way and ensure an effective transition back into the classroom for hundreds of thousands of students. Based on our work on the ground partnering with individual families to help their children succeed in school, we recommend that the City take the following steps:

Invest in a corps of professionals to focus on academic support, social-emotional support, and outreach to students and families.

The City needs to recruit and train additional staff, including bilingual staff and shelter-based staff, in all three areas to help with educational recovery and implement the recommendations below.

Provide a summer program for students at all grade levels with opportunity for one-to-one or small-group instruction, evidence-based intervention, and specialized support for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems in a trauma-informed setting.

- » ***Summer school should take place in person to the greatest extent possible*** for families who want it, with a priority for students with disabilities, ELLs, students who are homeless or in foster care, and students who are in or returning from the juvenile or criminal justice system.
- » Given the disruption students have experienced, ***summer school should be available for students starting in kindergarten instead of third grade and should extend to students who are 21 or older*** who would normally age out of school but need more time to earn a diploma or receive transition services in light of the pandemic. It should be open to all students who need the support regardless of whether they have incomplete coursework or whether their promotion is in doubt.
- » To make summer school accessible to all students, ***the summer program must include specialized support for students with disabilities, ELLs, and students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems,*** and

bus service or other door-to-door transportation should be available for younger students and students with disabilities who need it to attend in-person summer learning.

- » **Summer school must be fully and explicitly compatible with the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)** so that older students do not have to choose between career-focused paid work experiences and academic support.
- » **All students attending summer school should be provided instruction in a trauma-informed setting and offered behavioral and mental health supports and services.**

Provide intensive one-on-one or small-group tutoring.

The City should ensure students get [“high-dosage” one-on-one or small-group tutoring](#) multiple times per week to ensure students get the individualized support they need to get back on track academically. While remote instruction can be part of the City’s recovery plan, it cannot be the only option, as many students do not have sufficient technology or adult support needed to participate. Tutoring should be embedded into the school day for all students (for example, a period each day) and complement regular classroom instruction, with additional options offered before or after school, on weekends, and over the summer and other school breaks. Tutors should be trained in research-based approaches including how to work with ELLs and students with disabilities, receive ongoing support, and work with a consistent cohort of students with whom they build relationships. All programming must include specialized support for students with disabilities, ELLs, and students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems and must include bus service or other door-to-door transportation for younger students and students with disabilities who need it.

Provide make-up services to students with disabilities who did not receive their legally mandated instruction and services during the pandemic so they can start to catch up.

Under federal law, students with disabilities have the right to “compensatory services” to make up for any instruction and therapies they missed. The DOE should develop a citywide, non-adversarial system for determining which students require compensatory services and providing those individualized services as soon as possible. Parents should not have to shoulder the burden of requesting these services through administrative hearings.

Provide ELLs with additional, targeted support so they can start to make up for instruction missed during the pandemic.

ELLs have a legal right to receive bilingual instruction or “English as a New Language” instruction, but many ELLs have not received this instruction during the pandemic. Given the immense challenges ELLs face in participating meaningfully in remote learning and the lack of language support, the City’s education recovery effort should include a targeted plan to provide ELLs with the in-person instructional support they have missed during the pandemic, starting this summer if possible.

Launch an all-out effort to help students learn to read.

Before the pandemic, less than half of NYC students were reading proficiently, with alarming disparities based on race, disability, language, and housing status. The pandemic has made the situation even more dire. As the City recovers from the pandemic, it cannot afford to have schools using outdated curricula shown not to be effective.

- » **Ensure schools use evidence-based, culturally responsive reading curricula for core instruction.** The City should provide schools with a menu of curricular options from which to choose and fund the

purchase of the materials and training necessary for successful implementation to ensure every student receives explicit, systematic instruction in foundational literacy skills as outlined in the report of the [National Reading Panel](#).

- » **Resume the promising Universal Literacy coaching program.** Before the pandemic, more than 400 Universal Literacy coaches were working to help K–2 teachers improve their literacy instruction. While coaches are serving as classroom teachers this year, they should resume their coaching responsibilities in 2021–22.
- » **Pair students struggling with reading with educators trained in evidence-based reading instruction.** Last summer, the DOE began matching small groups of students who need help in reading with educators trained in effective interventions. The DOE should continue that program this summer and expand it into the next school year. Such support can be provided in-person or remotely to ensure that students can get support regardless of the staff available in their school.

Remove police and metal detectors from schools citywide and create safe, nurturing, and inclusive schools for all students.

Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately harmed by policing practices, including those employed by school safety agents. All students will not feel safe in school unless all indicia of law enforcement are eliminated from schools. The City must reimagine the school safety role instead of simply transferring school safety agents from the NYPD to the DOE.

Offer mental health supports to all students and targeted, intensive mental health supports to those most in need.

The pandemic has created and exacerbated social-emotional challenges for all members of the school community with trauma most acutely felt by children. While the City has committed to addressing student mental health, there is not sufficient funding directed toward their needs. Funding should not be squandered on social-emotional screening of all students when we know the magnitude of student need requires a systemic, whole-school, trauma-informed response with targeted interventions. Instead, funding, including NYPD school safety funding, should be allocated to:

- » **Provide direct services to support students' social-emotional needs.** The City must invest in staff trained in providing direct services to students, such as social workers and behavior specialists, to ensure every school can effectively support students' social-emotional and behavioral needs with trauma-informed approaches.
- » **Provide an integrated system of targeted, intensive mental health supports for students in high-need schools.** For example, the Mental Health Continuum, included in the City Council's FY 20 Response to the Preliminary Budget, includes school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics; a call-in center to advise school staff about students in crisis; direct mental health services; School-Based Mental Health Clinicians; and whole-school training in Collaborative Problem Solving, an evidence-based, skill-building approach.

Expand restorative justice practices citywide.

The City should invest in the expansion and full implementation of school-wide restorative justice practices in all schools, summer programs, and after-school programs. to address the root causes of student behavior, hold students accountable, build and heal relationships, teach positive behaviors, and keep students in class learning.

Engage in intensive outreach to families to ensure that students who have not been engaged in school return to school and can access summer and after-school options.

With thousands of students currently disconnected from school, the City will need to put significant work into strengths-based outreach to reengage students and their families and ensure young people return to school and access support offered outside of school such as summer programming or after-school tutoring. The City should fund outreach efforts in multiple languages, and formats, including by expanding the number of community schools beyond the 27 new community schools already announced and partnering with community-based organizations and should tailor efforts to focus on specific populations of students such as older youth, students who are homeless, students from immigrant communities, and students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. For older students, the City should expand paid internship and work-based learning experiences to help students return to school while still earning an income and preparing for life after high school.

Improve central and school-based communication efforts to ensure information shared with families is accessible, in their home language, and culturally appropriate.

Many families, including those whose home language is not English and those who have low literacy, have been left in the dark due to poor communication from their schools and from the City during the pandemic. The City needs to ensure that their communication efforts take into account the language and digital literacy needs of our most vulnerable families. Instead of relying heavily on the internet and email, the City should utilize multiple media, such as individual phone calls, text messages, notices on paper sent directly to families, and ethnic television and radio to share information with families.

Allow 21-year-olds aging out of school who have been unable to earn a diploma to return to school for the 2021-2022 school year.

We appreciate that the DOE allowed most students who aged out of school during the 2019-2020 school year but were unable to earn their diplomas or get needed transition services to return for the 2020-2021 school year. Unfortunately, the DOE did so without a plan to get the word out about this policy to eligible students without disabilities and the DOE did not fund the continued enrollment of students with disabilities placed by the DOE at state-approved non-public schools. The DOE should allow all students, including students placed at state-approved non-public schools due to their significant disabilities, to return to school for the 2021-22 school year if they were unable to earn a diploma or get transition services required for students with disabilities under the law.

Provide a preschool special education class seat for every child with a legal right to one so there are no children sitting at home following the pandemic because there are no seats available.

While the DOE is expanding 3-K Citywide, the DOE must also ensure there is a seat for every child with a disability whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires placement in a preschool special education class, whether run by the DOE or a CBO. Many young children with disabilities went without the intervention they needed during the pandemic, and specialized instruction at this critical stage in development will be important to the City's recovery plan. In addition to opening more classes, the City should extend salary parity to teachers working in preschool special education classes at CBOs who were left out of the City's early childhood education salary parity agreement before these teachers leave preschool special education classes for higher-paid jobs, worsening the shortage of seats.

Establish a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care and guarantee bus transportation for students in care so they can maintain school stability following the disruption of the pandemic.

The pandemic has underscored the need for DOE staff who know the laws that protect students in foster care, understand the barriers they face, and are looking out for this population of students. Especially following the disruption of the pandemic, schools can be a stabilizing force for students in foster care, but only if someone is focused on addressing their needs.

Provide students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems with additional targeted support and make-up instruction and ensure all staff working with young people in juvenile detention facilities and on Rikers Island have access to vaccinations.

During the pandemic, students in juvenile detention facilities and incarcerated on Rikers Island have had limited access to learning due to technological and logistical constraints. For example, last year, students in secure juvenile facilities and on Rikers Island could not be seen or heard by their teachers during periods of remote learning. Moreover, these students have not had access to any in-person instruction. Given the limited space and security issues in juvenile detention and on Rikers Island, it is particularly important that teachers and all other staff who work with young people in these facilities have access to vaccinations so students can receive in-person learning. Furthermore, the City's education recovery efforts must include targeted support and make-up instruction for all students who have been involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system during the pandemic.

As part of a recovery corps focused on outreach and engagement, hire 150 community coordinators to work on the ground in shelters to help connect students with school and other educational supports.

Over the past decade, student homelessness has skyrocketed, but the number of DOE family assistants working in shelters has not increased. Meanwhile, during the pandemic, students in shelter have had the lowest attendance rate of any student group. As the City rolls out initiatives to provide students with academic and social-emotional support as students return to school, increased onsite support at shelters is needed to ensure students can participate in school and access these services.

Focus on equity and ensure all supports provided are accessible to the students who need them most.

The recovery plan must have a focus on equity and be responsive to the disparate impact of the pandemic and the closure of school buildings on communities of color and groups of students who have struggled with remote learning. The City must ensure that supports provided are accessible to all children, including students with disabilities and ELLs, students living in shelter or involved in the child welfare or juvenile/criminal justice systems, and children whose families who speak a language other than English or have low digital literacy. For example, for any support provided after regular school hours or offsite, door-to-door transportation must be provided for all students who need it.