



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: DOE's Academic Recovery Plans and Intro. 2374-2021

October 27, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the DOE's academic recovery plans. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). 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 New York City parents and students navigate the education system. We focus on students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless, students facing discipline, and students with involvement in the child welfare or juvenile or criminal justice systems.

Over the past year, Advocates for Children has heard from hundreds of New York City families whose students were not getting the support they needed due to disruptions in education caused by the pandemic. We heard from families whose children had to wait months for an iPad, who did not have sufficient connectivity for their iPads to work or didn't have a quiet space for remote learning, whose assignments were provided only in English, or whose special education services simply didn't translate over a screen. These groups of students were often overlooked and underserved before the pandemic – and the inequities have only grown worse.

Following this unprecedented disruption in public education, we are grateful that the DOE has received more than \$7 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding. We appreciate that the City is using this funding for some important initiatives. At the same time, we worry there is still inadequate detail about how the funding will be used, inadequate funding for key priorities, and too much discretion and responsibility left to individual schools that already have their hands full reopening schools and keeping school communities safe. With our limited time today, we will briefly outline just some of the areas where we are advocating for change to ensure the funding is used effectively and that students get the support they need:

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- While we appreciate that the DOE has allocated funding to provide “recovery services” for students with disabilities after school or on Saturdays, these services will not be sufficient to provide all students with disabilities with the *compensatory services* they have a legal right to receive to make up for what they missed during the pandemic. Parents should not have to file hearings to get these services. We also have significant implementation concerns with how recovery services are being offered, including that the DOE has not committed to providing bus service.
- We are very pleased that the DOE plans to launch a contract enhancement for preschool special education programs, but the City has not yet committed to providing salary parity to teachers at these programs, putting the success of the program at risk.
- We appreciate that the DOE plans to roll out the new, citywide Mosaic Curriculum, and want to ensure this curriculum is not only culturally responsive but also grounded in the science of reading given the hundreds of calls AFC gets each year from families concerned about their children’s reading skills. And we want to ensure that students identified as needing more support following the DOE’s early literacy screenings can access evidence-based literacy interventions.
- We appreciate that the DOE has hired hundreds of additional social workers, but are disappointed that the DOE allocated only \$12 million in federal funding of the \$118.5 million needed to expand restorative practices to 500 high schools and only \$5 million of the \$15 million needed for the Mental Health Continuum.
- We are deeply disappointed that the DOE did not allocate funding for a comprehensive plan to support English Language Learners (ELLs), many of whom did not receive their mandated English as a New Language or bilingual instruction over the last 19 months, or for a multilingual communications and outreach plan and we continue to urge the DOE to make this investment.
- We are similarly disappointed that the DOE did not allocate any funding specifically to meet the needs of students who are homeless. Fortunately, the DOE will be receiving additional funding specifically for this purpose, and we are calling on the DOE to hire 150 shelter-based community coordinators to help connect students to school and other educational supports.

Finally, with respect to Intro. 2374-2021, we strongly support reducing class size. At the same time, we want to ensure safeguards are in place for students with disabilities, including those in co-located District 75 classes, who, historically, have been the first students excluded from school buildings when space is tight and who are often already traveling extensive distances to get to school. We want to reduce class size while also ensuring there is sufficient space for students with disabilities to get their instruction and services as close to home as possible per their legal right.



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