



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 Education

Re: Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget – Education

March 23, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York.

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With the federal government having approved the largest one-time investment in education in our nation's history, the City needs an ambitious education initiative to pave the way to hope and opportunity for this generation of students. We have submitted in writing [detailed recommendations](#), including the need for a corps of professionals to focus on academic support, social-emotional support, and outreach to students and families; an expanded summer program for students at all grade levels; high-dosage one-on-one or small group tutoring; evidence-based literacy instruction and intervention; compensatory services for students with disabilities, make-up language instruction for English Language Learners, and targeted support for student populations such as students in the juvenile justice system; significant mental health support; intensive outreach to help ensure students can return to school and access summer programming; and extended school eligibility for 21-year-old students who would otherwise age out this year but need more time to earn a diploma or get transition services due to the pandemic.

I want to highlight a few issues that we had brought to the Council's attention before the pandemic and where action is needed even more urgently now.

First, while the Preliminary Budget would expand 3-K to four additional districts, it includes no additional support for [preschool special education](#). Data released last week confirm what we've seen on the ground: even this spring—in a year when the pandemic has led to a steep decline in preschool special education enrollment—the City still has a shortfall of hundreds of preschool special education class seats. The City cannot claim to provide Pre-K for all while continuing to leave children with the most significant special education needs out in the cold. This year's budget must



include sufficient funding for these legally mandated classes and must provide salary parity for teachers of preschool special education classes at CBOs.

Second, especially given the impact of the pandemic, funding, including NYPD school safety funding, should be allocated to providing [direct services to support students' social-emotional needs](#). The City must invest in staff such as social workers and behavior specialists and provide an integrated system of targeted intensive mental health supports for students in high-needs schools such as the Mental Health Continuum included in the City Council's FY 20 Response to the Preliminary Budget. The City should also invest in the expansion of school-wide restorative justice practices in all schools to address the root causes of student behavior and keep students in class learning.

Third, the pandemic has underscored the need for a [DOE Office for Students in Foster Care](#) with staff who know the laws that protect students in foster care and understand the barriers faced by this population of students, who have the lowest graduation rate of any student group in the City. Currently, there is not a single DOE staff member focused full-time on students in foster care. 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.

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