



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 and Committee on Civil and Human Rights

Re: Advancing Diversity and Equity in NYC Public Schools

June 18, 2025

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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 (AFC). For more than 50 years, AFC 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 New York City school system.

The diversity of New York City is one of its greatest strengths. Our schools educate children of every race and religion, children born in places across the globe, children speaking more than 150 languages at home, children with a wide array of disabilities, children living in shelters and in brownstones.

Yet, NYC is home to one of the most racially segregated public school systems in the nation. Beyond the placement of students, we continue to be alarmed by persistent disparities in access to schools, programs, and educational opportunities, as well as persistent disparities in educational outcomes, for Black and brown students, students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and students who are homeless or in foster care, among other student populations.

Our City should set ambitious goals for tackling disparities based on race, disability, and ELL status across a wide array of educational opportunities and outcomes; should approach each initiative, program, and policy change with a central focus on students who need the most support to succeed in school; and should tailor support to ensure its current and new initiatives meet the needs of different communities and populations of students to ensure all students have meaningful access and can fully participate in all programs.

With my limited time today, I am going to focus on what the Administration and the City Council can do in the next week as you finalize the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. To



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help meet some of the pressing needs we see on the ground in our work with families, we urge the City to increase funding for the following initiatives:

- To provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations, services, and classes they need, as 3-K and Pre-K are not “for all” when more than 600 children are waiting for seats in preschool special education classes and more than 7,000 preschoolers are waiting for one or more service, such as speech therapy or counseling; our early childhood programs should not leave behind the children who need the most support.
- To make more schools fully accessible because accessibility benefits everyone and students with physical disabilities should have the same school options as their peers.
- To expand the immigrant family communications and outreach initiative to help ensure immigrant families can get key information about school in a language and mode that works for them.
- To enhance services at school-based mental health clinics to better meet students’ behavioral needs and keep them in school.
- To expand access to one-on-one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read because the disparities we see in reading are unacceptable and all students should get the effective reading intervention they need within our public school system.

As the City moves forward, it must ensure that all education programs and initiatives – from career readiness programs like FutureReady to after-school programs – provide tailored support to ensure that all students can access these programs and fully participate. For example, given the lower employment rates for people with disabilities, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) should be doing all it can to prioritize preparing students with disabilities for careers—not leaving them out of career readiness programs when students need more support than typically provided.

We appreciate that data reporting bills championed by the City Council have allowed us to identify disparities and push for solutions. To that end, while we are still reviewing the bills on today’s agenda, we recommend that Intro. 955-2024, requiring reporting on after-school programs, not only disaggregate the number of students enrolled by race, gender, and grade level, as required by the current bill language, but also by students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students living in shelter, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care. This is particularly important given the barriers in access to after-school programs we have seen for students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care, who are more likely to rely on bus service to get home and do not have access to transportation at the end of after-school programs, as well as the lack of support we have seen available for students with disabilities after 3pm. We recommend similar disaggregation with respect to Intro. 142-2024, requiring reporting on student access to home internet and electronic devices.

In the face of attacks on diversity and equity, the City must stand firm and double down on its commitment to ensuring our school system builds on the diversity of its students and provides needed support so all students can succeed in school. We appreciate the role Chair Joseph and the City Council have played in celebrating the diversity of our students and working to ensure that



students who have historically been overlooked or excluded have access to the full array of programs and opportunities and get the support they need.

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