

EMERGENCY COALITION TO SAVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

DRAFT Testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing on the

2024-2025 Executive Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Education

February 1, 2024

Thank you Chair for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. My name is Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy for the YMCA of Greater New York, and I'm testifying today on behalf of the Emergency Coalition to Save Education Programs. Over 160 organizations have come together to urge our New York elected leaders to identify funding to sustain essential education programs that are supported by through federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars set to sunset this June.

Over the last few years, school districts across the State used federal stimulus funding not only to help address temporary pandemic-related challenges, but also to pay for a range of important programs, staff, and services to meet needs that existed long before the pandemic.

The New York City Department of Education alone used around \$1 billion per year to pay for supports and programs that are needed long term. For example, New York City used the funding to:

- Double the number of young children participating in 3-K;
- Provide enhancements to preschool special education programs to help address the significant shortage of these legally required classes;
- Hire 450 school social workers, allowing nearly 194,000 students to gain access to a social worker;
- Increase the number of community schools providing students and their families with wrap-around supports from 266 community schools in 2020-21 to now 421;
- Support Learning to Work programs, providing support to help over-age, under-credited students earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan;
- Expand restorative justice practices, allowing more schools to use alternatives to exclusionary discipline that keep students in the classroom while helping them build and repair relationships;
- Hire 60 school psychologists and 15 family workers to address delays in the evaluation process for students with disabilities;
- Expand bilingual programming to support the education of English Language Learners;
- Hire coordinators to work in shelters to help children who are homeless get to school and access needed educational support;
- Support literacy instruction and dyslexia programming, helping to support screening, new programs for students with dyslexia, and targeted reading interventions in dozens of schools;
- Expand access to translation and interpretation services;

- Support Student Success Centers where trained youth leaders help their peers with the college admissions process;
- And much more.

The need for these programs and supports is not going away next year.

Unfortunately, the school aid proposal in the Executive Budget would make it harder for New York City and other school districts to keep pace with growing costs, much less continue programs and supports currently funded with expiring federal dollars. At this moment in time, the State Legislature must explore all funding options and ensure that the final budget includes a substantial investment in education to help school districts sustain important education programs as their federal stimulus funding expires.

As our coalition's call-to-action, attached to our written testimony, states:

“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.”

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