



STUDENTS' ESSENTIAL NEEDS MUST DRIVE APPROPRIATIONS
EQUITY FOR YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS' SUCCESS



**BUDGET TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE FISCAL AND EDUCATION COMMITTEES**

PRESENTED BY
DR. LUÍS RODRÍGUEZ, INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
FEBRUARY 1, 2024

Distinguished members of the Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees, I extend my deepest gratitude for this opportunity to represent the Yonkers City School District. As Interim Superintendent of Schools, it is both an honor and a significant responsibility to present before you in this role. I am here to champion the needs and aspirations of our amazing students and their families, as well as our extraordinary teaching and support staff. In the past, our state, local, and federal leaders have responded to Yonkers' needs with both support and a collaborative spirit, especially during challenging times. This is another example.

Our unified effort has been instrumental in fostering an environment where our students have flourished. We have seen firsthand the transformative impact of investing in education, particularly in urban communities like ours. It's imperative that we maintain this momentum and continue to allocate resources effectively, especially in critical areas such as classrooms, educator support, pupil support services, and safety.

Yonkers, New York's third-largest city, has consistently demonstrated that through dedication, resilience, and teamwork, an exemplary urban community with top-notch governance and education can be realized. Despite numerous challenges, our District has effectively addressed the varied needs of our highly diverse students, enabling them to reach their full potential. The remarkable graduation rates over the past several years are a testament to our commitment to excellence and a rejection of the deficiency model. We operate under the belief that our students are inherently capable and deserve high expectations and equitable opportunities to enhance their academic and social-emotional growth.

While we acknowledge that YPS, along with school districts throughout the state, has experienced a post-COVID downward enrollment trend (averaging approximately 700 students per year), overall, that is not the case regarding students with special needs. On the contrary, through the CSE process, YPS has established Special Education services eligibility for approximately 100 additional students per month over the past three years.

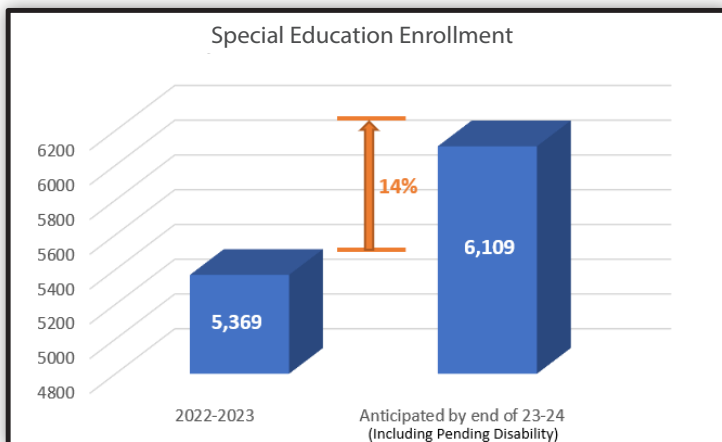


TABLE 1

From SY 2022 through the current year, the District has closed 17 sections of less intensive support of special instruction classes and opened 45 class sections of more intensive support settings, to better address student needs, representing a net gain of 28 class sections

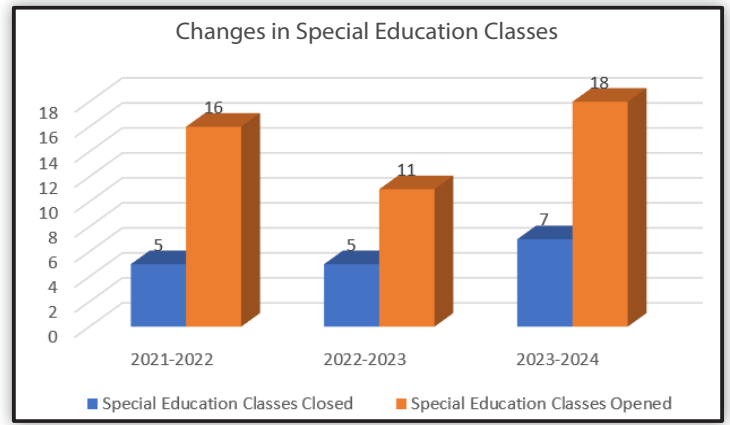


TABLE 2

Our annual growth comparison of students with disabilities by classification demonstrates substantive increases (14%) overall relative to SY 2022-23 (Table 1). It underscores that much of those increases cluster around significant cognitive disability associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders (approximately 19% - Table 3).

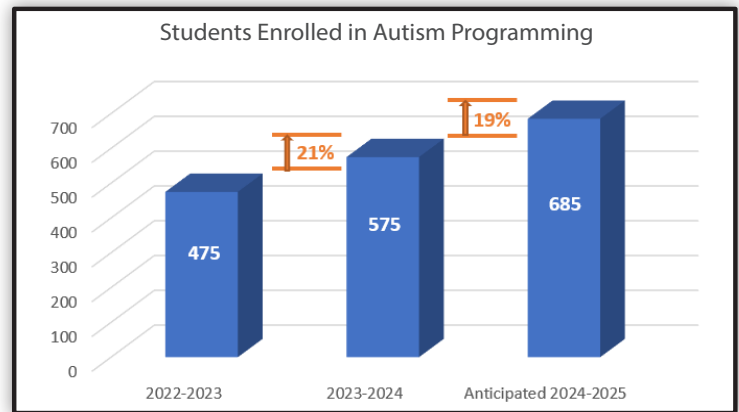


TABLE 3

Another proxy measure that provides further evidence of this higher service demand level is the incidence with which the District has had to request NYSED authorization to exceed class size restrictions for specific Special Education programs. The number of such authorizations increased from 108 in SY 2023. Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that for the first five months of SY 2024, the District has already filed 103 variance requests, almost the same number granted during all of last school year.

PROGRAM	APPROVALS
Resource	2
15:1	35
15:1:1	12
12:1:1 TIP	4
12:1:2 AU	10
8:1:2 AU	40
TOTAL	103

TABLE 4

PROGRAM	APPROVALS
Resource	3
15:1	30
15:1:1	9
12:1:1 TIP	5
12:1:2 AU	9
8:1:2 AU	52
TOTAL	108

TABLE 5

Of paramount importance to this discussion is what we call "case mix." This refers to the fact that YPS is receiving not only a higher demand for special education services, but also that the intensity of the services required to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) has gone up. This is reflected in our partnership with Saint Joseph's Medical Center, for the provision of Occupational and Physical Therapy services.

As Table 6 demonstrates, due to case mix intensity, since SY 2018-19, the number of therapy sessions in those two disciplines has increased from approximately 50,000 **group** sessions to over 70,000 sessions (40%), and the number of sessions provided to children **individually** has increased from approximately 24,000 to an estimated 29,000 for the same periods (21% increase).

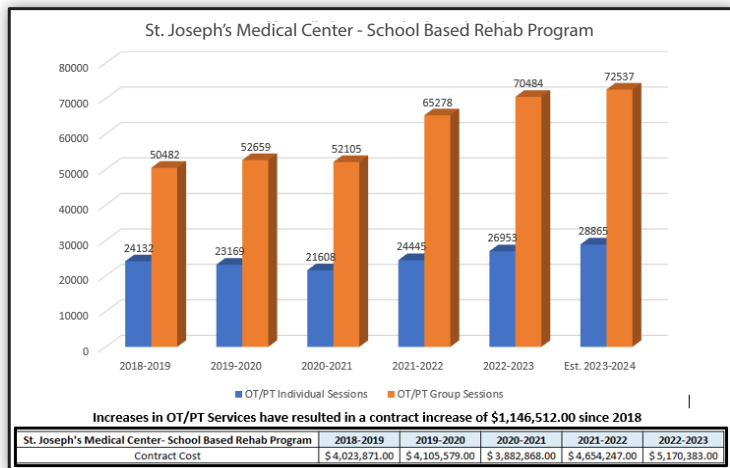


TABLE 6

The associated costs to the District for providing those services through the above-referenced contract, has gone from **approximately \$4 million to an estimated \$5.3 million.**

Further evidence of the more intensive needs reflected in our current student cohort is in the area of Aides. The number of Aides hired by the District in response to CSE determinations that children require 1:1 assistance and supervision to access their education, has increased from an estimated 81 such positions to 310 such positions, a 283% increase from SY 2022 to SY 2024. These data do not include Classroom Aides added to satisfy the staffing requirements of the previously mentioned additional Special Education settings we've opened. Nor have we touched upon the additional costs to the district for transporting these children in smaller, more specialized vehicles, in some cases even requiring skilled nursing services during transport. Similarly, cost increases associated with an increase in the number of students referred to out of district programs, because the severity of their disability is such that they can't be properly managed in LRE (community schools), is also not addressed in this document.

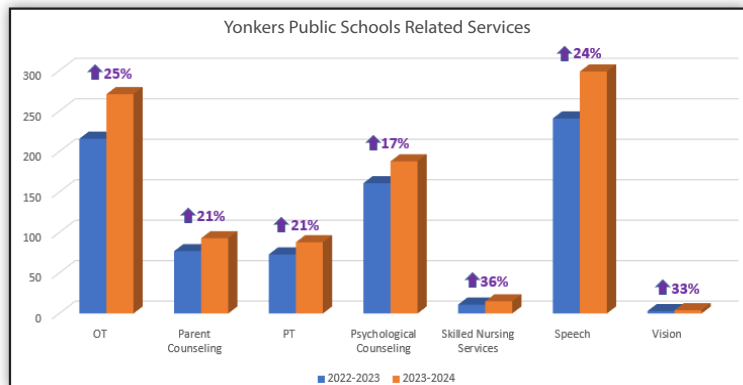


TABLE 7

The success that the YPS District achieved despite these concerns has been promoted by many factors, the most important of which has been our ability to provide more and more intensive social-emotional support to our students. This has been largely accomplished through the dedicated and caring efforts of our

Social Workers, Psychologists, and Counselors. The retention of a full-time Psychologist and increasing coverage of Social Workers and Counselors in every school in the District is absolutely critical to continued success. **So is the recognition that Yonkers ranks 282nd in the state, in per-student total Aidable Pupil Units for SY 2023-24.**

Yonkers Public Schools stands today as a model urban district, thanks to balanced budgeting and strategic planning that has involved all stakeholders. The support from the City of Yonkers, the State of New York, and federal initiatives like the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) have been critical to our students' success. However, the journey doesn't end there.

This budget period presents a crucial moment to ensure that the services our students rely on are not just available, but guaranteed. I urge this committee to provide the requisite funding to secure a bright future for our students, our families, and our city. Despite our gratitude for the non-recurring revenue that has supported essential programs in the past, it falls far short of sustaining the comprehensive and equitable programs crucial for our students' continued development.

These include arts, music, physical education, library services, and our Teachers, Counselors, Psychologists, Social Workers, Nurses, and Safety Officers. Critical programs, such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), require a stable funding stream that both promotes and rewards access. Stop treating UPK funding as expense-based aid, depending on enrollment, and tie funding to actual costs incurred. For urban communities, the uneven flow in enrollment does not reduce the expense. **To wit, the District expends approximately \$20 million in pre-k programming and receives an estimated \$13 million in support.**

In terms of Career and Technical Education (CTE), we must also further develop and create new CTE programs, focusing on industries' needs. In so doing, an increase in the per-pupil appropriation, which has been flat for over a decade, is critical, as is the inclusion of CTE services provided to 9th-grade students in the appropriation. As we face a significant fiscal challenge of an estimated \$87 million deficit, it's imperative that our elected officials commit to providing recurring revenue to maintain these vital programs and services. Yonkers Public Schools, recognized for its efficiency and effectiveness, deserves the chance to continue innovating in education, especially for marginalized students, without the looming fear of falling off a financial cliff every budget cycle.

The next school year will be pivotal for the stability and progress of Yonkers Public Schools. Our students' ongoing success hinges on your commitment and support. I urge you to provide Yonkers Public Schools the resources necessary to sustain and enhance an educational system wherein every child has the opportunity to succeed and benefit from enriching learning and support experiences. Despite our respective titles, as child advocates, we are in the business of nation building. By creating an informed and skilled citizenry, we safeguard and advance our democracy, thereby promoting our national security.

Dr. Luis Rodríguez
DR. LUÍS RODRÍGUEZ
 Interim Superintendent of Yonkers Public Schools

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS...



29,594 Urban Students

24,895

Prekindergarten to Grade Twelve Students

- Prekindergarten ages 3 & 4 - **1,323**
- Kindergarten to grade 12 - **22,726**
- Students with Disabilities in Out-of-District Schools - **846**

16,309 Economically Disadvantaged (68%)

4,625 Students with Disabilities (19%)

3,208 Multilingual Learners (13%)

15,006 Hispanic (62%)

3,766 African American/Black (16%)

5,295 White, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, Multi-Racial (22%)

**Percentages Apply to In-District Students*

4,699

Yonkers Students attend:

- Charter Schools - **911 students**
- Parochial/Private Schools - **3,788 students**

These students receive **transportation, textbooks, library resources, nursing services, pupil support services, Title I, II, III and IV funds** and **special education services**.

YONKERS ARPA-ESSER INVESTMENT IN THE CLASSROOM ALLOW US TO SUSTAIN STAFF FUNDED BY ARPA

The infusion of federal funding was meant to have a lasting impact in enabling students to not only recover from lost in-person instruction, but also in allowing us to address longstanding disparities in access to educational opportunities for students that were only exacerbated as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.

\$33 Million – Total of 209.10 Full-Time Staff

- ▶ **5.00** **Assistant Principals**
- ▶ **84.00** **Teachers**
(Aquatics, Art, Foreign Language, Music, Physical Education, Reading, Facilitator, ENL, Library, CTE, Special Education & Teaching Assistants)
- ▶ **86.10** **Guidance Counselors, Psychologists and Social Workers**
- ▶ **34.00** **Various CSEA Union Positions**
(Custodians, Pool Staff, Nurses, Public Safety, Technicians, School Aides, and Program Specialists)



DR. LUÍS RODRÍGUEZ

Interim Superintendent of Yonkers Public Schools

Yonkers Public Schools
lrodriguez2@yonkerspublicschools.org
914-376-8100

BOARD OF EDUCATION TRUSTEES

Rev. Steve Lopez, President
Dr. Rosalba Corrado Del Vecchio, Vice President
Gail Burns, Kevin Cacace, Dr. John C. Castanaro, Sheila Greenwald,
Amjed I. Kuri, Rosemarie P. Linton, Lawrence R. Sykes, Esq.