

TESTIMONY OF NYC SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA
ON THE PROPOSED 2015-2016 STATE EXECUTIVE BUDGET BEFORE THE
STATE ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS AND SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEES

Tuesday, February 3, 2015

Good morning, Ways & Means Chair Farrell, Finance Chair DeFrancisco, Education Committee Chairs Nolan and Flanagan, New York City Education Subcommittee Chair Felder and all the members of the State Assembly and State Senate here today. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on Governor Cuomo's proposed 2015-2016 Executive Budget. Seated with me is Ray Orlando, the New York City Department of Education's Chief Financial Officer.

I want to begin by thanking all of you for making a difference in the availability and quality of education for our students. Your efforts will certainly yield immeasurable gains in the lives of many for years to come, especially with your strong support last year for free, full-day pre-kindergarten and high-quality after-school opportunities for all middle school students. In particular, I want to say 'thank you' to Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan, Senator Simcha Felder, and the New York City delegation for all your hard work on behalf of our City's students. Your efforts were instrumental in helping us achieve our successes this past school year.

At the outset, I want to clearly impress upon this body that we need full support of the State Legislature for the continuance of mayoral control in New York City. The inclusion of mayoral control in the Governor's budget is a crucial acknowledgment of its importance to the continued improvement of education in New York City.

I have seen the extraordinary difference mayoral control can make in our ability to move our school system forward. Our successful implementation of pre-kindergarten was in large part because we had mayoral control of education. The same can be said for after-school programs, as well as our efforts with Community Schools. With mayoral control, Mayor Bill de Blasio and I can realize our joint goals of helping our neediest students, turning our struggling schools around, and ensuring that high-quality teachers teach our students.

Before I discuss what our City's students need to help ensure their success next school year, I would like to share with you all that our Administration has accomplished for our students.

With the \$300 million the State invested last year, we were able to enroll over 53,000 students in full-day pre-kindergarten. Our City's children are learning at nearly 1,700 sites at public schools and Community-Based Early Childhood Centers in neighborhoods across the five boroughs. With the momentum we built in the City's communities, we are well positioned to meet this year's goal of providing seats for every eligible four-year-old throughout the City.

We have invested \$145 million this year—the City’s largest-ever expansion of after-school for middle school students—to provide enriching programming for over 70,000 middle school students in traditional school settings and community-based centers across the City. I have made it very clear during my time as Chancellor that after-school programming, especially for middle school students, is crucial to increasing high school graduation rates. Our after-school programs have the potential to be a support system, academically and emotionally. Not only do they help improve academic performance, they foster a sense of community at a critical time in a child’s development.

We have also created 45 new Community Schools through a State Attendance Improvement and Dropout Intervention grant, which will be a vital tool in reaching thousands of children at risk of falling behind as a result of absenteeism, and an Office of Community Schools to oversee this effort. Schools will work with a community-based organization to develop tailored supports to improve attendance at each school, including: social services; counseling and mental health supports; and expanded learning opportunities. At Community Schools, parent involvement and engagement happen every single day, embedded in every single component of the school. I have seen parents in classrooms as volunteers, parents learning lessons so they can support their children inside and outside of school, and parents as partners supporting each other—and this directly impacts student engagement and achievement.

There is nothing more critical than supporting our most challenged schools. As part of this Administration’s commitment to ensure that all of our students receive a quality education, regardless of their background, family income, or zip code, we recently identified 94 City schools as Renewal Schools. Over the next three years, we will work intensively with each Renewal School’s community to establish clear goals, provide a core set of interventions, and hold them accountable for rapid improvement. Each Renewal School will transform into a Community School, knitting together new services that support both students and their families. With the support of our new Director of Renewal schools, these schools will also provide an extra hour each day of extended instruction and could offer additional after-school, weekend, and summer learning opportunities as needed. Moreover, each will receive additional resources for academic intervention and professional development to create a better learning environment for students.

To address the needs of our English Language Learners, we expanded our Dual Language programs in the City. In the 2015-2016 school year, we will open 40 Dual Language programs as part of the Department’s commitment to student achievement and increasing multilingual programs.

The goal of the Dual Language program is to educate students to become bilingual and bicultural. Our students will learn new cultures, and parents will come into classrooms in new ways. As a former English Language Learner myself, I know firsthand that these are critical programs. At the same time, we are also recognizing that speaking multiple languages is an asset for students, families, schools, and our entire City.

As part of our goal to ensure that NYC students are prepared for careers in the 21st century economy, we continue to strengthening our existing Career and Technical Education and Workforce Readiness programs. For example, we are working with the Partnership for NYC, and other employer partners such as Bank of America, National Grid, and Con Edison to create more work-based learning opportunities for students.

Last year, we also introduced the *Framework for Great Schools*, a bold, innovative, research-based capacity framework for guiding and measuring school quality. This framework identifies six essential elements necessary for continual school improvement: rigorous instruction, a supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective leadership, strong family-community ties, and a culture of continuous learning and trust.

To ensure that schools are receiving supports that are better aligned to the *Framework for Great Schools*, we recently announced structural changes in the way we align support and supervision for our schools beginning in the 2015-2016 year. We are streamlining the school support system to create equity and more efficient lines of communication between our City's schools and families. In our new, geographically-based support structure, there are four core components—superintendents, geographically-based Borough Field Support Centers, Central divisions, and Affinity Groups.

As envisioned by the mayoral control legislation, superintendents will supervise, support, and advocate for schools in their district to ensure student achievement goals are met and will work with the local community to support family engagement in the learning process. This structure will allow a more equitable division of resources among schools, clear lines of accountability, and a single point of contact for both Central divisions and families.

To facilitate these reforms, all district and high school superintendents had to reapply for their positions this summer in accordance with new criteria to ensure that all new superintendents had at least 10 years of pedagogic experience, including at least three as a principal. This rigorous process required them to have a demonstrated ability to raise student achievement as well as engage families.

These structural changes will give us the tools we need to drive improvement across the system, and ultimately help each child fulfill his or her potential as an active, critical-thinking member of our City. We are implementing the changes over the next eight months to ensure another smooth start to school in September.

I would like to turn to the specifics of the State's proposed budget and its impact on New York City. The State's 2014-2015 Enacted Budget committed \$1.5 billion over five years to support the phase-in of State-funded, full-day pre-kindergarten programs. In the 2015-16 Executive Budget, New York City schools are allocated \$300 million of the \$340 million investment for pre-kindergarten programs, the same amount granted last year.

I appreciate that the Governor is raising the question of where we go next. In terms of next steps for early childhood education, his proposed \$25 million for pre-kindergarten for three-year-olds in the highest-need school districts is not only ambitious but acutely necessary to ensure the academic success of our youngest learners.

Last year's Enacted Budget included support for after-school programs. The proposed Executive Budget does not include any commitment for after school. In continuation of last year's acknowledgment of the importance of after-school programs, we were hopeful that there would be funding in the Governor's Budget proposal. We ask that the Legislature include State funding for after-school programs as one of its priorities in budget negotiations.

We set our education agenda and aggressively charged ahead with doing the work necessary to renew the City's commitment to high quality education opportunities for all our students. The bar has been raised on a multitude of levels and we are committed to continuing the effort to improve New York City schools. The Executive Budget also raises several proposals, including tenure and charter schools, as part of the education reform agenda. We are currently in the process of implementing our own reforms, including the Community Schools and Renewal Schools initiatives.

As you know, since 2009 the State has not met the court-ordered obligation to our City Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit: an obligation the Court of Appeals rightly defined as providing a "sound basic education" to all children in our state. The decision in that case was a matter of simple justice. It ordered the end of an historic wrong created by the manifestly unfair distribution of State education aid to local school districts. In this school year alone, New York City public school students will be shortchanged some \$2.6 billion in State education funds. I am confident you will agree that, with the level of resources available, it is time to make a significant down payment on this obligation this year—fulfilling a commitment and making equity in education a priority.

Today, I ask the State Legislature, on behalf of the over one million students I serve, to equitably fund public education for the New York City school system and all of the students in New York State. I look forward to working with the State Legislature and the Governor on the proposals outlined in the Executive Budget, and stand prepared to do everything I can to help. We have laid the foundation, we have set the path, and we need your support to forge ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.