

**Testimony of New York City Public Schools Chancellor David C. Banks:
New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
on Elementary and Secondary Education**

February 8, 2023

Good morning and thank you, Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger, Chair Benedetto, Chair Liu, Chair Mayer, and members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance committees. My name is David Banks, Chancellor of New York City Public Schools, and I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today on the proposed 2024 New York State Education Budget.

Much has changed since I became Chancellor a little over a year ago. When we began, COVID-19 cases were skyrocketing, so we urgently and thoughtfully managed that crisis with precautions to make our schools safe while allowing in-person learning to continue.

I know we're all happy that we're in a different place now. While keeping our students and staff safe and healthy continues to be our highest priority, we have been able to lift many restrictions on our campuses.

The last few years have taken a significant toll on students and their families. Even before the pandemic, many families were making the choice to leave our schools, and that accelerated during the crisis, not only in New York City but also in urban districts across the country.

In the five years prior to my becoming Chancellor we lost over 120,000 students, and 70,000 in the last two years. The reasons for leaving may vary, but the answer to declining enrollment is clear: we have to give our students and families the opportunities and experiences they want in the classroom, and we must do a better job of showing them how our schools are giving students the skills and knowledge that will drive success in their lives after school.

My administration is focused on rebuilding trust with our families and bringing families back to our schools.

We remain guided by the Four Pillars I laid out a year ago to build trust with our families and our New York City Public Schools community.

Our first pillar is Reimagining the Student Experience. We have created programs like our Pathways Initiative, which is designed to give our students real-world experience leading to a rewarding, engaging career, as well as financial independence and long-term economic security.

The second pillar is Scaling, Sustaining, and Restoring What Works. That includes expanding opportunities that were historically denied to some of our most vulnerable children.

This fall we announced a \$205 million dollar investment in proven, research-based programs such as ASD Nest, Horizon, SEED, and a path to improve outcomes for students with special needs.

Let me reiterate – these are proven programs already in our schools that educators and families identified as life-changing for their children. This winter, we doubled down on this commitment when we announced we are improving and aggressively adding early childhood seats for this population.

I want you to know that this Administration sees our students with disabilities and is moving quickly to scale the high-impact programs that our students need to be successful in life.

Pillar Three is: Prioritizing Wellness and its link to student success. Both the Mayor and I believe that when the whole child is well, the family is well, and the whole community is well. That is why we have an ongoing commitment to increasing healthy school food options and to more deeply integrating mindfulness work in our classrooms.

One of the things that keeps me up at night is the safety of our children. Our students cannot be well if they are concerned about their physical safety outside of school.

As a former teacher, school safety agent, and principal, I take this work personally. We cannot solve violence, particularly violence impacting our young people, solely through police efforts. Our schools have a vital role to play in keeping our students safe and supported, and I am 100 percent committed to that work.

We launched Project Pivot in response to feedback we've heard about the value of collaborating with trusted community groups to provide programming that really engages and excites students. Project Pivot offers counseling, mentoring and learning opportunities through recreational outings, sports, and arts programs, and violence intervention and prevention techniques.

Finally, Pillar Four is: Engaging Families to be our True Partners. One of my first decisions as Chancellor was to eliminate the redundant position of Executive Superintendent and to fully empower the district superintendent. I charged my administration with going above and beyond what is required by law to ensure the community has an active role in questioning candidates and providing feedback. That included elected officials who helped make this process successful, many of whom are sitting here today.

Most recently, we made good on our promise from last spring to convene a working group of volunteers representing parents, advocates, union leaders, and school-finance experts from across our city to recommend long-needed changes to the Fair Student Funding Formula.

Two weeks ago, we announced the outcome of that working group. We are proposing two important changes: adding funding weights for students in temporary housing and for schools that serve high numbers of students with high needs

These two changes are major steps forward in ensuring our schools are funded equitably, and they are the result of deep collaboration with our community. Significantly, our decision to add a funding weight for students in temporary housing is the first to be implemented among the five largest school districts in the nation, and we welcome the opportunity for the State's Foundation Aid formula to follow suit.

One area of our work represents all four pillars – our work getting back to the basics of literacy and improving supports for students with dyslexia and other print-based disabilities.

This work started with moving all of our kindergarten through second-grade classrooms to a foundation of phonics-based literacy instruction. For too long our schools relied on methods that work for some, but not all. Too many of our students were left behind and struggled to become fluent readers. I'm proud to report that this work is well under way – guided by a literacy council of educators, parents, and experts.

Building on that work, Mayor Adams and I announced the largest, most comprehensive approach in the nation to supporting public school students with dyslexia.

For the first time, all New York City public school students will be assessed for risk of dyslexia, supported in their neighborhood school, and provided specialized instruction through the development of special programs and academies.

The work we've launched over the last year will continue to grow in scope and in impact. And our schools will continue to innovate on this foundation—to look for and address any barriers that may stand in the way of a child becoming a proficient reader and a confident learner.

It has been an enormous pleasure for me to visit and learn from many of you in recent months.

As many of you know, Mark Treyger, the former teacher and Education Committee Chair of the New York City Council, is a part of our team. He not only advises us through the lens of an elected official, but he has helped us strengthen vital partnerships across the City. He has joined me in meetings and school visits with many of you...

- Chair Krueger at the Julia Richman Education Complex, and I greatly appreciated her support for our decision to appoint Superintendent Kelly McGuire in District 2;
- Chair Weinstein, who shared concerns with my team related to enrollment declines at local schools;

- Chair Liu, who has championed the work to advance AAPI curriculum in schools to deepen student understanding while building a more inclusive society. I'm proud that we have been able to launch a successful AAPI curriculum pilot and plan to build on this important work.
- Chair Benedetto, who joined us at a recent education related town-hall meeting in Co-Op City, where resident voice was front and center.
- Assembly Member Hyndman, who came with us to Pathways College Preparatory School in Queens and has fiercely championed support for schools in her district and across the State.
- Assembly Member Simon, who came to Bridge Preparatory Charter School, which is specifically geared to meeting the needs of students with dyslexia and other language-based learning needs.
- And Assembly Member Walker and Senator Brisport, who have partnered with my team to support the work of the Shirley Chisolm Daycare Center.

I want to thank the State legislature and Governor Hochul for continuing to increase vital State Foundation Aid, while approving the extension of mayoral accountability, which has allowed our administration to safely and fully reopen our schools while making critical investments in meeting the needs of our students in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Mayoral accountability allowed us to swiftly and strategically support newly arrived New Yorkers who are seeking asylum. Last summer, the city administration launched Project Open Arms to coordinate the city's efforts to immediately enroll and support newly arrived students. Additionally, I immediately appointed a central leader to ensure that support reached our students, schools, and families as quickly and effectively as possible.

The full funding of our Fair Student Funding Formula happened because of the state's commitment to totally phasing in the funding for the Foundation Aid formula and making good on the promises of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision.

Thanks to our great State partners, this year has been the first year ever – in the 15-year history of the formula – that schools have been funded at 100% Fair Student Funding without the use of temporary stimulus dollars.

I want to thank Governor Hochul for including in her budget proposal the third and final piece of that phase-in.

And I thank all of you who advocated tirelessly to make that investment in our kids and our schools a reality over the last several years.

When you enacted the extension of mayoral accountability for New York City schools in your last legislative session, you prioritized family input by expanding the Panel for Education Policy to bring greater representation from across the city.



I'm pleased to say that we successfully convened our first meeting with the expanded Panel in January, and my team has been energetically working to build relationships with new and returning PEP members, to hear their feedback about making the Panel successful.

While I am proud of the work we have completed in my first year as Chancellor, I know we still have so much to do to help the New York City Public Schools achieve our mission of ensuring that each student graduates on a pathway to a rewarding career and long-term economic security, equipped to be a positive force for change.

I have seen so many wonderful things happening in our schools, and I'm excited to work with all of you to enable every school in our city to lift our students to a great future.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.