



**TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

**BEFORE THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE & ASSEMBLY
COMMITTEES ON FINANCE, WAYS & MEANS, AND EDUCATION**

REGARDING THE PROPOSED FY24 EXECUTIVE BUDGET

FEBRUARY 8, 2023

Good morning. My name is Karen Alford, and I am the vice president for elementary schools of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). I want to thank both the Senate and the Assembly for this opportunity to discuss the proposed fiscal year (FY) 2024 Executive Budget and share our perspective on key initiatives. Joining me today is Andy Pallotta, president of the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT); and Alithia Rodriguez-Rolon, NYSUT's director of legislation.

On behalf of the more than 190,000 UFT members, I want to recognize Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for their strong leadership. I also want to recognize the support, guidance and commitment of their colleagues Senate Finance Chair Liz Kreuger, Assembly Ways & Means Chair Helene Weinstein, Senate Education Chair Shelley Mayer, Senate New York City Education Chair John Liu, and Assembly Education Chair Michael Benedetto.

Thank you to all the members of the legislature for their support as we enter the final phase of fully funding the foundation aid formula. Its because of your leadership that the students of NYC will receive the funding they deserve. I would also like to take a moment to thank you for championing the historic class-size legislation signed into law last year. I can confidently say that our students in New York City will be better off with the new class-size limits.

We are encouraged by the funding for public schools included in this year's executive budget, but we have serious concerns to share, particularly related to the proposed expansion of charter schools in New York City.

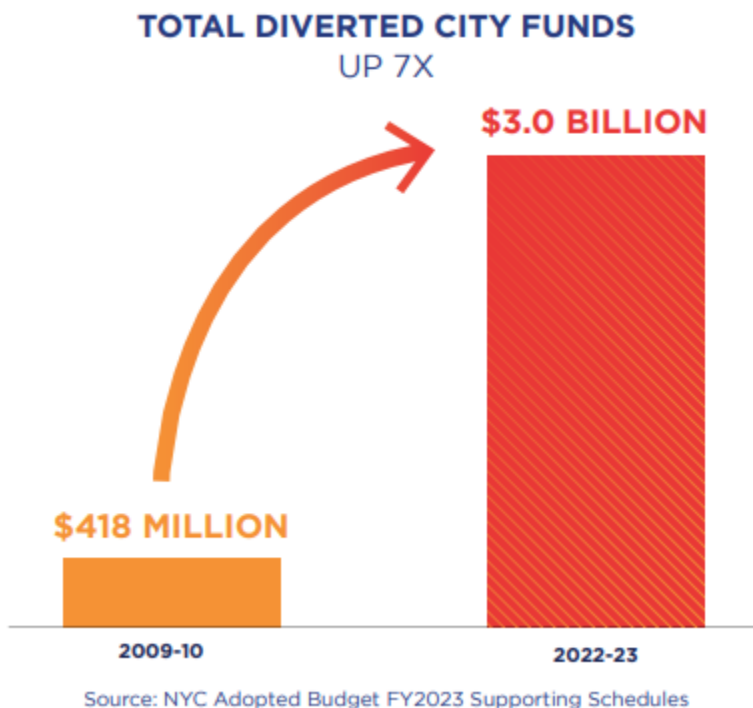
School Aid

We applaud Gov. Kathy Hochul's commitment to fully fund our public schools. We are pleased to see that the promise to fulfill the needs espoused in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision has been kept, and we no longer play political football with our state's school aid. We also want to acknowledge the members of these chambers have always been champions for the full funding of our public schools.

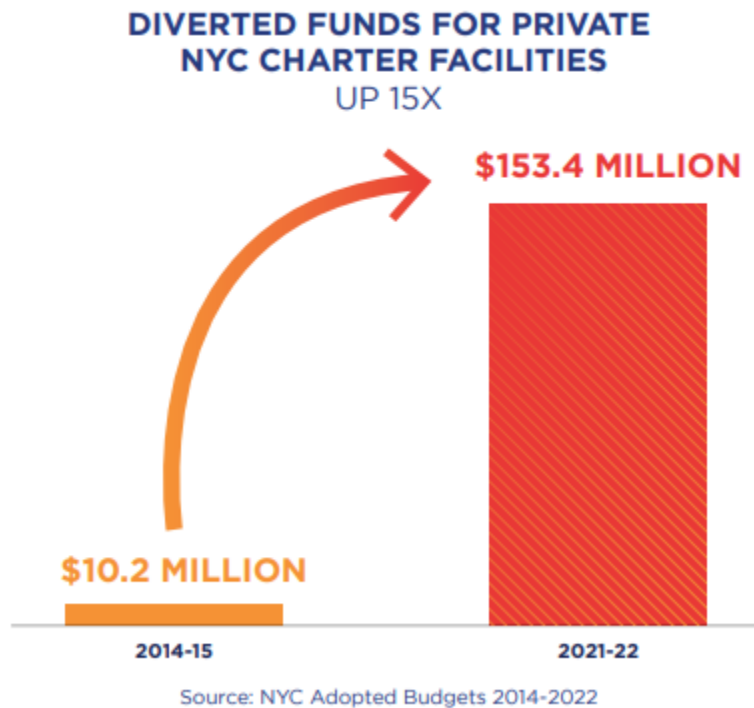
Charter Schools

We are extremely concerned with the governor's proposal to allow 106 new charter schools in New York City. The reality is that under each charter, corporate education chains can open elementary, middle, and high schools in separate locations, so the increase could be, in fact, more than 300 new schools. Charter schools already drain resources from our local public schools, "cull" students they have labeled as "disciplinary problems" by repeatedly suspending them and counseling out students who have academic difficulty, and lack transparency about their finances. We urge you to oppose the governor's proposal to scrap the regional cap on charters in the city and revive so-called "zombie" charters.

Our analysis of the city's adopted budgets since FY2010 shows that in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, New York City diverted \$3 billion to fund its charter schools, seven times higher than the total \$418 million diverted in the 2009-2010 adopted budget.



Under a law foisted on the city by then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo, New York City is required to provide free space for charters in its school buildings or reimburse their rent. Of the 275 charter schools currently in New York City, 128 are in DOE-owned or DOE-leased buildings and 147 are in non-DOE space. Our analysis of the city’s budgets since FY2015 shows the rental aid the DOE pays for charters schools grew to \$153.4 million in the 2021-22 school year, 15 times higher than the \$10.2 million paid in 2014-15. It’s important to also note these public taxpayer dollars wind up in the pockets of private landlords. We urge the legislature to pass S2137 (Liu) to repeal the use of public funds to pay for private facility space rented by charters in New York City.

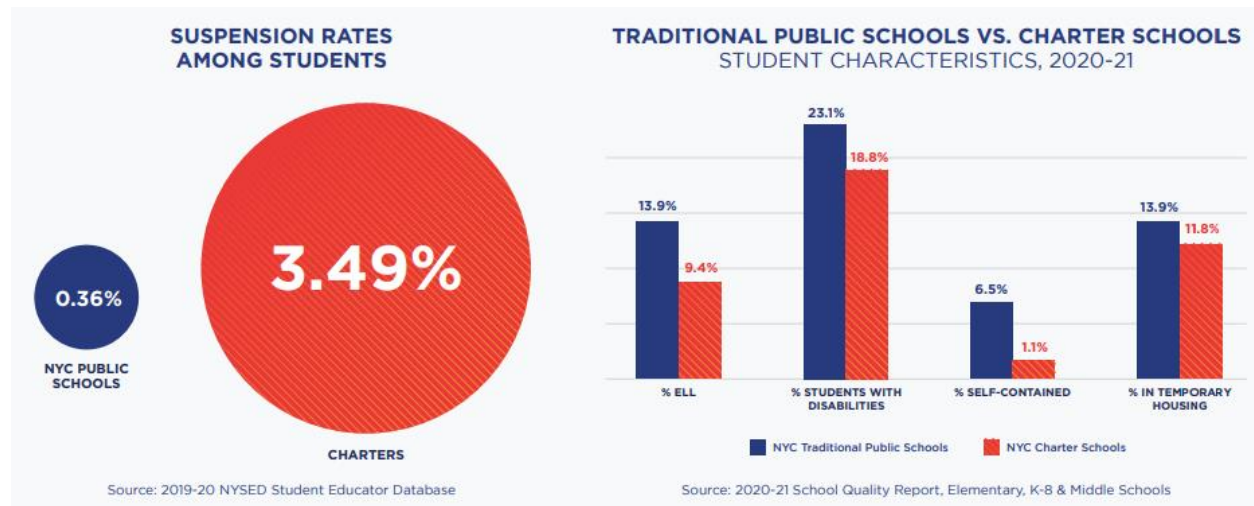


With new class-size limitations going into effect this upcoming school year, NYC public school buildings need all their available space to lower class sizes. However, a loophole in education law permits charters to expand the grade levels they serve and has allowed them to expand their footprint, most recently triggering serious co-location conflicts in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. This year we have seen a flurry of co-location applications submitted to accommodate for grade level expansions. Charters should not get a “three schools-for-one-charter” deal, which is why we need to pass S2974 (Mayer) to limit their grade-level expansions.

I would like to conclude this section on charter schools by urging you to pass two critical pieces of legislation that would improve transparency and accountability in the charter industry. Unfortunately, overtime, we’ve allowed for an unequal playing field to emerge when we compare our public and charter schools.

First, we need to pass S1395 (Liu) to make the Board of Regents the sole charter authorizer in the state to improve consistency in review of charter applications, renewals and revisions. Let's end the practice of allowing charters to shop for authorizers to approve their applications or a school's educational program. We need to hold charters to uniform review standards.

Second, let's pass the Charter School Transparency and Accountability Act sponsored by Sen. Hoylman and Assemblyman Benedetto to improve transparency in how charters raise and spend money and hold them accountable for too many suspensions and under enrolling the city's most vulnerable children including students with disabilities, English language learners and students in temporary housing.



The citywide data is shown in the above chart. Furthermore, an analysis of school quality reports for the 2021-22 school year reveals that 33% of students in Manhattan's District 5 public schools had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) compared to 21% in charters and 18% in Success Academy charter schools; 14% of the students in these public schools were in self-contained classrooms, compared to 0% in those charters.

United Community Schools and Community Schools Categorical Aid

Our United Community Schools (UCS), a program with the ability to transform public schools, serve as a lifeline for students and families. Our UCS schools address the needs of the entire school and community by focusing on six key areas: educator support, extended learning time, health and wellness, community engagement, academic support, and parent and family engagement.

UCS is embedded in 30 schools in New York City and two schools in Albany. Last school year, UCS collectively supported 20,000 students and their families, helped feed 12,000 families, provided 14,000 health and wellness visits, and proved a 6-to-1 return on investments with a \$100,000 investment in a community school director resulting in \$600,000 in resources for the school.

In 2019, UCS selected Metis Associates, a NYC-based research firm, to conduct a three-year evaluation of UCS from the 2019-20 school year to the 2021-22 school year. The evaluation highlighted that UCS enrolls more students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students than the city's non-community public schools and the programming had a statistically significant positive impact in three areas:

- UCS students attend approximately three more days than similarly situated non-community school students in a 182-day school year;
- UCS students achieve 2.5 scale score points higher than similarly situated non-community school students; and
- UCS students earn $\frac{1}{2}$ high school credit more than similarly situated non-community school students; UCS students also accumulate $\frac{1}{2}$ high school credit more annually than non-UCS high school students.

To maintain these accomplishments in the upcoming school year, we are requesting the enacted budget include a \$4 million grant for UCS. In addition, and independently, we are requesting that the state consider allocating \$100 million in categorical aid for community schools statewide with UCS receiving \$5 million of the total amount to work with the state and use our model and our expertise to provide technical assistance statewide.

Teacher Center

For more than 40 years, the UFT Teacher Center has been a guiding light for NYC educators. Our UFT Teacher Center accelerates learning and empowers students through award-winning, embedded professional development tailored to each school's unique needs. We are very disappointed that the governor's FY24 executive budget does not include any state funding for Teacher Centers.

Last year's funding allowed us to open 30 new sites so that now there are 140 Teacher Center sites in the five boroughs. During the 2021-22 school year, we provided 100,000 hours of professional development to 231,000 educators focusing on what NYC educators, students, and parents most need including social-emotional support, technology support, ensuring equity and cultural competency, and empowering and engaging students.

Our goal is to continue mentoring new teachers, expand support for project-based learning and formative assessments to increase student engagement and meet Next Generation Learning Standards, maintain our partnerships with Google and Apple, extend support to special education paraprofessionals and educators who work with migrant students, and continue to integrate Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education offerings.

We are asking the state to fund Teacher Centers statewide at \$30 million to closely match last year's funding of \$28.5 million.

Positive Learning Collaborative

For nearly a decade, the Positive Learning Collaborative has worked with schools throughout New York City to provide the tools, techniques, and coaching to change school cultures and overcome systemic barriers that make it difficult for students to learn. Our research-based approach equips educators with complementary tools, integrating Culturally and Historically Responsive Education, mindfulness practices, community-building circles and more.

PLC schools allow students to thrive. Our programming in PLC schools led to a 46% decrease in behavioral incidents and suspensions from 2014 to 2019, supported students in making three times more gains in English language arts scores over city and state schools pre-COVID, increased positive relationships between students and educators by 66% from 2017 to 2022, and delivered 16,000 sensory toolkits between 2020 and 2022 to help students readjust to the classroom during the pandemic.

Our PLC public school educators and clinicians cultivate a strong relationship among staff members, collaboratively designing action plans within our schools and customizing at every stage. Today, PLC provides intensive support to 35 schools citywide but, in 2022, PLC expanded its approach to include programming in 120 additional schools, partnering with Community School District 9 (Bronx) and District 31 (Staten Island) to offer healing-centered professional development.

We ask for a \$2 million grant to sustain this vital program and a \$9 million grant for a pilot to expand the Positive Learning Collaborative outside New York City in response to [NYSUT's Safe Schools for All Taskforce](#) report.

Career and Technical Education

We applaud the governor's plan to create a robust high school-college-workforce pipeline by investing \$10 million over two years to have school districts, community colleges, and our Regional Economic Development Councils develop strategic workforce plans to promote job readiness statewide.

In addition, we continue to advocate for an increase in the \$3,900 per pupil funding cap in the Special Services Aid and to include funding specifically for 9th-grade students.

Mental Health and School-Based Health Centers

We support the governor's proposal to expand school-based health centers and increase student access to mental health services at the centers. Our United Community Schools partner with school-based health centers to provide health and wellness visits as part of their programming.

I am proud to report that through our advocacy work, the number of social workers and counselors in New York City public schools has increased, according to a UFT analysis of payroll data.

In October 2022, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) had 2,286 social workers, a 28% increase from 1,791 two years before in October 2020. Similarly, the DOE had 3,191 guidance counselors, up from 2,938 in October 2020. While this is progress, we still are understaffed to match the need, and we must hire more school psychologists and mental health providers to match the ratios prescribed by professionals.

Healthcare

We strongly oppose the governor's "Pay and Pursue" proposal. We should work toward reigning in hospital costs, not provide hospitals with more opportunities to increase their profits on the backs of union members. This proposal fails to consider how added costs will be passed along to patients.

In the meantime, we are working with the New York City Council to pass Introduction 844-2022 to establish an Office of Healthcare Accountability with the authority to audit city expenditures on employee-related health care costs and to make recommendations on how to lower these costs. The office would also be tasked with publicizing information on the costs of hospital procedures and the cost transparency of each hospital.

Closing Thoughts

I would like to conclude by thanking, once again, all members of the Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means, Senate Education, New York City Education and Assembly Education committees for hosting today's K-12 education budget hearing. We're encouraged by the funding allocated to public schools in this year's executive budget but have serious concerns with the proposal to expand charters in New York City.

We look forward to working with the legislature this year as we continue to do the best we can to provide all our students access to a high-quality public education.

Thank you.

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