



United Way
of New York City

2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Education on February 1st, 2024

To: Senator Shelley B. Mayer and Assemblymember Michael Benedetto

From: Abdullah Younus, Vice President of Government Relations, United Way of New York City

Date: February 1, 2024

Dear Senator Mayer and Assemblymember Benedetto,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Education on behalf of United Way of New York City (UWNYC) and our over seven hundred partner organizations across New York City. Thank you for your leadership and investment in the success of students, teachers, and schools across New York State. **We are writing to request the inclusion of \$2 million in funding for RWC Fellows**, a first of its kind program that trains humanities teachers to integrate computer science into English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies classroom instruction. This funding would support the training of 250 ELA and social studies teachers over a two-year period. In addition to integrating computer science into ELA and social studies, UWNYC has also been advocating for the implementation of a universal after-school pilot program. **We also kindly request your leadership and advocacy in garnering support for the creation of a Universal After-school Pilot Program.**

In its current form, the RWC Program is privately funded and administered by United Way of New York City. It aims to remedy the digital inequities that Black and brown New Yorkers face. Access to resources is perpetually obstructed for the families and schools of New York City's Black and brown children, preventing them from preparing students for the realities of an

increasingly digital world. In New York City, as of 2019, [only 19%](#) of Black and Latinx high school students experienced computer science in class compared to 29% of their white and Asian peers. Many of these students are unable to benefit from computer science resources because in the Bronx and other high-poverty areas, [over 40%](#) of households lack high-speed broadband access. These inequities persist for Black and brown children even as an increasing number of jobs in New York State [require](#) advanced literacy and technology skills, with 458,000 jobs in New York State remaining unfilled in 2022 and employers exclaiming a need for workers with “the ability to create digital content, consume it, act on it, communicate it, share it, and find it.” Without access to digital learning, Black and brown children will be left out of these high-paying opportunities contributing to the existing disparities in computer-oriented jobs. Currently, Black and Latinx workers comprise [only 15%](#) of computer-oriented jobs, compared to the 82% who identify as White and Asian, nationally.

With New York State’s investment, RWC will deepen our commitment to building teachers’ capacity to meet children’s literacy needs in a Digital Age through an expansive and innovative definition of literacy that includes digital forms of reading, features writing instruction as a necessary complement to conventional reading instruction and introduces computer science instruction via literacy and humanities contexts. Currently, the RWC Fellowship is active in high-need areas of the Bronx, the focus borough for 2023. The Fellowship is currently supporting a cohort of fifteen middle and high school ELA teachers serving 2,000 students and leading the way in demonstrating computer science as a literacy and humanistic practice that can live and thrive in school classes like ELA, social studies, and the arts. By expanding the RWC Fellowship, thousands more children, teachers, and caretakers will be exposed to an increasingly vital field for economic and civic engagement that is currently closed to them.

In addition to the digital inequities that children in high-poverty neighborhoods experience, many of their families are also facing an affordability crisis. The high cost of living New Yorkers experience is fueling an exodus of working class families with families making between \$32,000 and \$65,000 [leaving](#) at the fastest rate. Black and Latine families make up a [disproportionately](#) high share of those movers. 94 percent of New York State’s population loss is from New York City, where on average, families [spend](#) at least a quarter of their income on childcare.

We believe that the path forward from this crisis requires New York State to invest in the creation of a Universal After-school Pilot Program. Currently, [less than half](#) of public schools offer free, city-funded after-school programs, leaving hundreds of thousands of students on waiting lists. Moreover, beyond the economic advantages, after-school programs play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of our communities, particularly during the hours when crime is most prevalent. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, violent crimes committed by juveniles

peak at the end of the school day. Engaging in academic and recreational activities after school would not only occupy more young individuals but also help keep them away from potential trouble.

We know that the New York Senate and Assembly Committees on Education are committed to ensuring that public schools provide the range of opportunities all students need to fulfill their potential. Today, as digital skills become a requirement for many high-paying jobs and an affordability crisis makes it challenging for working families to remain in their homes, investing in innovative programs is essential to providing such opportunities. RWC draws on innovative research in computer science education that embeds computer science into the humanities, making computer science equitable for all students. Universal after-school programs will increase and equalize educational opportunities, keep kids out of trouble, and ease the lives of working parents. Thus, we kindly request the inclusion of \$2 million in funding for RWC Fellows and your support for the implementation of a universal after-school pilot program.

Thank you for your time and ongoing support.

Respectfully,

Abdullah Younus

Vice President of Government Relations

United Way of New York City