



**BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE – NYS
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING – ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
FEBRUARY 1, 2024**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Black Child Development Institute NYS (BCDI – NYS) is a growing, statewide organization based in Albany, New York whose mission is to serve Black children and families to ensure their present wellbeing and bright futures. Our service is not exclusive to Black children and families; however, our work centers the needs of Black children and families with an understanding of the long-standing legal, social, and cultural barriers that create the disparities they face. BCDI NYS, started as BCDI Albany in 1997 and stems from the work of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), founded in 1971. We are part of NBCDI's network of more than 20 villages across the country with a shared purpose. Our research-based work is centered around Eight Essential Outcomes for Black children:

Positive narratives – every Black child is seen as a child

Education – attends a school that affirms and expands them

Health – is born at a healthy weight

Nutrition – enjoys meals with vegetables

Safe Community – lives in an uplifting community where they can play, explore and thrive

Climate – breathes clean air and drinks clean water

Digital Safety – hangs out on a safe and appropriate internet

Representation – sees themselves reflected in books and toys

Our literacy programs include Read to Succeed, a community-based literacy program that promotes and educates on early reading through reading and other literacy events in partnership with family day care providers, early childhood education centers, libraries, public housing authorities, salons/barber shops and other MWBEs, schools, and more. In addition, our programs focus on family engagement and community organizing to educate, inform, and connect children, families, and communities in regard to opportunities, strategies, and resources to break down barriers and achieve the greatest impact.

Today, I want to focus my testimony on literacy. In the Executive Budget, \$10 million is provided for New York State Teachers Union (NYSUT), and an additional \$2 million is provided for SUNY and CUNY for micro-credentialing for teachers. This funding would support teacher training related to the science of reading. Teacher training is vitally important.

P.O. Box 232 Glenmont, New York 12077 518-888-7890 hello@bcdialbany.org



We applaud Governor Hochul for prioritizing literacy by including Back to Basics funding and initiatives in the Executive Budget. However, the initiatives are dedicated solely to teacher professional development overlooking parents, families, and communities. Parents are their children's first and lifelong teachers (please read "parents" to include/mean families). As the policies and practices are considered, developed, and implemented regarding literacy, the science of reading, curricula, pedagogy, etc. parents must be included as partners – at the state and local levels. Policy makers, district leaders, and schoolteachers often point to parents as critical to the success of their children in school. It is important at this time, especially on this issue, that parents are not just engaged but engaged as partners, again at the state and local levels. Please read "parents" as parents and/or families.

What has happened around the science of reading, happened largely without engaging, informing, or engaging parents in real time. Parents are made aware long after the fact. Denying them the opportunity to intervene and employ strategies to counteract what is or isn't happening within the classroom. Moreover, it denies parents the opportunity to even ask a question. As a result, students have continued to be miseducated and undereducated while the education agencies and institutions engaged in an internal debate. Many parents, families, and communities are shocked, disappointed, and truly heartbroken to know that their children missed the opportunity to learn to read and they were not even aware there was a debate about the curricula, that experts questioned the science behind what was being taught in schools, that teachers may not have been trained to teach reading. Precious time has been lost. That must end now. State and local practices regarding parent, family, and community engagement must be improved. Parents must be engaged as education partners on the state level with the New York State Education Department and on the local level with school districts. New York State must invest in making sure parents, families, and communities, information, training, and strategies regarding what can and should be done now to improve literacy and prevent further harm in terms of time and development lost.

IT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT BLACK PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ALONG WITH OTHER MARGINALIZED PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ARE PRIORITIZED FOR INVESTMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES AND THE RESULTING IMPACTS IN BLACK COMMUNITIES AND OTHER MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES.

Parents deserve training so they can implement literacy strategies based on the science of reading right now. Parents, families, and communities deserve to be partners in the consideration, development, implementation, and review of education policies and practices, including curricula, pedagogy, and teacher training. It is in your power to make sure that happens with investment and legislation enacted in the FY2024 New York State Budget.

Yomika S. Bennett
President

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