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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Zakiyah Ansari. I am the advocacy director for the Alliance for Quality Education. Thanks to the NYS Senate's commitment to fully fund Foundation Aid and give guidance on the federal ARP funding that New York City received constituting a massive infusion of funds to support children and their development. NYC received a \$530 million increase in Foundation Aid and about \$7 billion in federal funding (\$4.8 bil ARP & \$2.1 bil CRRSA).

**Parent Engagement:**

The New York City Department of Education was required to engage with all stakeholders, including parents before making plans for the new resources available to districts. AQE worked to inform communities of the new federal and state aid coming to districts by hosting information sessions for AQE parent leaders around the state including 4 in NYC. Parents were eager to learn about the new aid coming to their communities and the potential uses of these new resources. Communities were ready and eager to provide input in district plans to adequately address the needs and demands of Black, Latinx and low income families, educators, and students in each community.

Research and evidence, combined with parent and community input, are necessary to inform the actions of school district leaders — primarily regarding their planning and implementation of the federal and state funds that are available to them during COVID recovery and reopening. It is our understanding that DOE took the time to engage the community with a series of conversations in all 5 boroughs. Whether or not parents felt it was worth their time, is the real question.

Due to the lack of trust between families and the DOE, some parents are still hesitant about sending children back to school while the spread of the COVID-19 virus continues. As we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and the Delta variant we urged and continue to urge NYC to offer a remote option, so students and educators can attend class in a capacity that allows for everyone to stay safe. Black and brown parents have been leading the charge to demand an equitable remote option for their children as part of the Restore Remote Campaign and we have been in full support of their demands.



## **KEEPING THE SAME ENERGY:**

**A People's Agenda for Education and Racial Justice**

**New Yorkers *for*  
Racially Just Public Schools**

**Education *for* Liberation**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the start of 2020, the nation has encountered multiple crises that have prompted many to action: the global COVID-19 pandemic, economic stratification, the unrelenting murder of Black people by law enforcement, inhumane immigration policies, and environmental racism. These crises have far-reaching impacts for our public schools and are symptoms of past and present institutional and structural racism in public education.

While the aforementioned crises have pushed society to rethink how we re-engage the social contract, policymakers have not - as the kids would say - kept the same energy when it comes to education. In the last seven years under Mayor Bill de Blasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo, we still saw students of color pass through any number of security measures that their white and wealthier school counterparts did not. We saw more conversation about implicit bias, but not enough about systemic racism in our policies and practices. We may have nudged toward less dependence on high-stakes standardized tests, but we still pretend that achievement on these tests evidences school quality, rather than segregation and inequitable power structures. We still don't have enough counselors, social workers, and nurses to respond to the breadth and depth of student and community needs. It shouldn't have taken a global pandemic to get regular cleaning supplies into schools and proper devices into students' hands.

In other words, the demands we made to remedy our education system before the pandemic were the floor. Now, we wish to address the ceiling.

We envision and demand a fully integrated, fully funded and equitably resourced, free, universal pre-K/3-K through college and vocational educational system, including out-of-school-time programming, that serves all individuals from birth through post-secondary education and career.

Every New York City student deserves an education that is high-quality, transformative, culturally responsive, and provides tools and opportunities for all students to equitably participate in



democracy, enter the workforce, and ultimately reach their fullest potential. We imagine a truly public education system that prioritizes and values the most vulnerable students that fall within any intersections of historically marginalized students of color, students living in poverty, students living in transitional housing, students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL), documented and undocumented immigrants, and LGBTQIA+ students. All students have the right to physically accessible spaces, inclusive learning environments, and safe and supportive schools that utilize restorative practices.

**We seek schools that our children love and that love our children back.**

This historic moment demands a re-imagining of a public education system rife with inequities that public officials have largely lacked the courage and will to address and redress in policy and practice. This re-imagining is especially critical in NYC now because this year of pandemic learning leads directly into the 2021 fall elections in which New Yorkers will choose a new Mayor and 35 new City Council members to serve them.

## PLATFORM

**We call on elected officials and candidates to publicly endorse this platform for racial justice in education and commit to enact the policies and practices that will bring it to fruition.**

### #SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Dismantle policies and practices that criminalize and dehumanize youth, and fully fund efforts to build nurturing and supportive school communities.

### #CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

The Department of Education must ensure that all NYC schools use curriculum, pedagogy, assessments and policies that reflect and respect the histories, cultures, languages, identities and experiences of NYC students in every grade, every class, every day.

### #TRULY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Halt the privatization of public schools and the expansion of charter schools.

## PLATFORM

### #INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Eliminate racist admission policies that facilitate segregation from all DOE schools. Enact policies using the 5 R's of Real Integration framework and the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) that will facilitate equitable admissions policies at all DOE schools.

### #FULLY AND EQUITABLY FUNDED SCHOOLS

Close the resource gap and provide all students with the small classes, enrichment, hands-on education and care that all young people deserve.

### #INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Center all policy decisions and investments on student populations that are systematically excluded and historically marginalized, especially English Language Learners, students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and students involved in the juvenile/criminal justice system.

### #ENGAGED SCHOOLS

Engage youth and families as key partners in decision-making at all levels, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized families.

## WHO WE ARE

New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools is a new citywide coalition aimed at centering racial justice in policy and budget decisions for public education, and collectively influencing the education agendas of the candidates for Mayor and City Council in the 2021 elections.

The coalition brings together three stakeholder groups:

1. Parent, youth, and educator organizing and advocacy groups
2. Education policy and service delivery agencies
3. Elected and appointed parent leaders through the Community Education Councils, Education Council Consortium, Panel for Educational Policy, School Leadership Teams, and other bodies

The goals of the coalition are:

1. To create a bigger “we” with the collective power to advance racial equity in education, both now and under the next city administration
2. To shape the dominant public narrative about racial equity in NYC public schools
3. To influence candidates and elected officials to embrace and enact our policy platform for racial equity in education



## CONTRIBUTORS AND SOURCES



- EduColor’s [NYC Schools for Transformative Change](#) letter
- NYC Coalition for Educational Justice’s [Platform for Culturally Responsive Education](#)
- Urban Youth Collaborative’s [Young People’s School Justice Agenda](#)
- Integrate NYC’s [Platform for Real Integration](#)
- Advocates for Children
- New York Immigration Coalition’s [Education Collaborative](#)
- ARISE Coalition
- [School Diversity Advisory Group](#) Recommendations
- Dignity in Schools NY Campaign’s [guide for police-free schools](#)
- Girls for Gender Equity’s [The Schools Girls Deserve](#)
- Alliance for Quality Education’s [Roadmap to a Just Reopening](#) and [Campaign for Fiscal Equity](#)
- [Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation platform](#)
- Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) Caucus [Health Justice Agenda](#)
- Territorial Empathy
- Coalition for Asian American Children + Families ([CACF](#))
- [NYSABE](#) New York State Association for Bilingual Education
- Advocates for Children of New York Mayoral [Recommendations](#)

## #SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

### Dismantle policies that criminalize and dehumanize youth, and fully fund building nurturing and supportive school communities.

Police have no place in public schools. We embrace the [vision of school safety](#) created by the Black and Latinx young people who are most impacted by school policing.<sup>1</sup> We demand the removal of police from schools – not a restructuring, reassignment, reorganization, re-creation or retraining of the current punishing and demeaning system. We call for the redirection of the \$450 million spent annually on school policing to create truly safe and supportive school communities through robust mental health services, social and emotional support systems, and restorative/transformational practices. We seek to dismantle the school-to-confinement pipeline<sup>2</sup> in all of our schools writ large, especially in schools with majority Black and Latinx students.

End the policing, criminalization and dehumanization of youth in schools:

- Remove all police (School Safety Agents), scanning, metal detectors, cameras and invasive security measures and surveillance from schools, and redirect the funds to the policies below
- End arrests, summonses and juvenile reports except for student behaviors that poses a real and immediate threat of serious physical injury to the school community
- Advocate for schools to be sanctuaries that bar ICE from entering<sup>3</sup>
- End the policy of handcuffing and restraining students in emotional crisis or distress
- Require deescalation techniques to be used instead of calling EMS or police

Use the savings from ending school policing to create a culturally competent, healing-centered mental health service continuum

- Hire a Restorative Justice Coordinator in every school

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1. We follow the leadership of youth organizations that have been leading advocacy on this issue for decades, including Dignity in Schools Campaign, Urban Youth Collaborative and Girls for Gender Equity.

2. Dr. Monique Morris, Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools

3. Maintain and strengthen protocols to protect families from ICE and immigrant detention in school communities. Ensure full implementation and training on protocols in all schools.

## #SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

- Increase the number of culturally competent, trauma-informed mental health support staff to a ratio of 1 per 100 students, including but not limited to psychiatrists, health educators, school nurses, social workers, community outreach workers, etc.
- Create well-paid, supportive positions in schools for Black and Brown community members which don't require bachelor's degrees: Paraprofessionals, Youth Advocates, Parent Coordinators, Community Outreach Coordinators.
- Empower school communities (students, teachers, principals, and parents) to oversee the hiring and training of staff, and increase positions for Black and Brown community members.
- Train every DOE employee in collaborative problem-solving, deescalation techniques, trauma-informed practices, anti-racist conflict resolution, restorative practices, and socioemotional development
- Train young people and families in peer mediation and restorative practices
- Expand the number of school counselors who are equipped to provide comprehensive in-school support to students who experience sexual violence
- Implement the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) Caucus [Health Justice Agenda](#)

Overhaul the suspension policies and practices that exclude children from their classrooms, result in hundreds of thousands of lost days of instruction each year, and disproportionately impact Black students and students with disabilities

- Eliminate suspensions for Level 1-4 infractions **during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- Eliminate all suspensions in pre-K through 3rd grade
- Decrease the maximum length of suspensions for Level 3-5 infractions
- Mandate guidance interventions and supports before the use of suspensions
- Overhaul the suspension hearing offices and process
- End dress codes and zero-tolerance policies.
- Fully implement school-wide restorative justice practices in all schools

## #EDUCATION 4 LIBERATION

**All NYC schools must use curriculum, pedagogy, assessments and policies that reflect and respect the histories, cultures, languages, identities and experiences of NYC students in every class, every grade, every day.**

Schools that invisibilize, demean and fail to educate youth of color perpetuate racial injustice. There is a [cultural gap](#) in NYC public schools: 85% of students are Black, Latinx and Asian, yet 60% of the teachers are white; 83% of books used in K-8th grade curricula are by white authors; and 51% of those books have white main characters. This gap presents a developmental challenge for students striving to establish their identity and sense of self. It also presents an academic challenge, as students engage less deeply and achieve at lower levels when their identities and experiences are not represented in the classroom.

- Fully invest in the NYC Department of Education's definition of [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education](#) with an expansion of the Office of Equity and Access
- Require that all new curriculum purchases including teacher materials, library books and book lists are culturally responsive and are aligned with the [NYC DOE's definition of culturally responsive-sustaining education](#)
- Fund Ethnic Studies courses in all NYC middle and high schools that include intersectional topics such as Black LGBTQ history, and ensure schools have the resources needed for these courses
- Continue, expand and deepen ongoing anti-bias, anti-racist, trauma-informed and [healing-centered](#) professional learning that has a strong grounding in the experiences of communities of different nationalities, cultures, languages, abilities, immigration statuses, racial groups, genders, socioeconomic status, and other identities
- Ensure that all interactions with students and families are healing-centered and honor the knowledge, beliefs and practices of the community
- Understand that schools belong to their community, and that community engagement must be central to all school practices and decisions
- Mandate an advisory program in every school, with a culturally responsive, locally determined curriculum based on population, languages spoken, and need
- Provide training for all staff on disability justice and gender justice, to ensure stronger support for youth with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ youth

## #KEEP PUBLIC SCHOOLS PUBLIC

**Halt the privatization of public schools and expansion of charter schools.**

We believe in the power, vision, and scope of our public schools. New York City has the largest public school system in the country, and the nation's largest city should respond in kind. When we say "public," we also mean democratic, dynamic, vital, and responsive to the needs of every New Yorker. We believe that every public school can meet and exceed the expectations set for them without market-based privileges such as lotteries or tuitions. When resources are diverted from our public schools, we undercut the City's most enduring social safety net and harm the children and families of New York. We believe that defunding public schools in service of private or charter schools is a false choice all too pervasive in our city.

- Elected officials and candidates must refuse to take funds from corporate charter networks and advocates for school privatization
- Support a moratorium on public funds for charter school expansion given concerns about continuing and unresolved civil rights violations, the impact of privatization on public education, and competition for resources within the public school system
- Support and advocate for state legislation that taxes the wealthy to fund public schools
- Request a state audit to determine the impact of large charter networks' growth in NYC and statewide
- Advocate to end the practice of [NYC paying rent for private spaces](#) for charter schools
- Halt co-locations of charter schools in buildings that are deemed as underutilized, especially in low-income communities of color, where they will deprive public schools of vital space for instruction, 1-1 counseling, related services, recreation, arts and science.
- Advocate to [change the state charter laws](#) to ensure accountability and transparency
- End the practice of making student and family personal information available to charter schools for recruitment without written parent consent
- Ensure that every adult in NYC public and charter school has union representation, including but not limited to custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and School Safety Agents

## #INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

**Integrate New York City public schools by implementing the 5 Rs of Real Integration: schools that are Racially, economically and ethnically diverse; foster Relationships across difference; practice Restorative justice as to not criminalize youth; have staff and faculty**

New York City continues to allow systemic racism to perpetuate segregation within our schools and their communities. Despite multiple calls for change from advocates, multiple task forces created by the City to provide solutions and multiple protests led by students, most of the levers of segregation remain and are sustained by the status quo. We call for the following demands to dismantle and disrupt the consequences of segregation in our schools and foster Real Integration.



## #INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

- Implement the 62 recommendations using the 5 Rs of Real Integration framework of the [School Diversity Advisory Group](#) that have already been adopted by the NYCDOE, and demand accountability for meeting goals
- Eliminate the use of all exclusionary admission practices/programs (G&T, middle and high school screens, and the specialized high school exam), and implement the 25 recommendations outlined by the [second SDAG report](#).
- End the discriminatory use of the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) as the sole determinant for entrance into NYC specialized high schools
- Recruit, support and retain educators of color through (1) funding and certification for teachers who are licensed in their country of origin; (2) resources to expand accessibility to the teaching career pipeline for people of color, people from minority languages and/or immigrant backgrounds; and (3) increased pathways for bilingual and English as a New Language (ENL) certification
- Recruit and support transgender and gender nonconforming teachers
- Commission a panel to conduct longitudinal, quantitative, and qualitative studies of the decline in the number of Black teachers and other educators of color in NYC public schools in the last two decades, and share its findings with the general public
- Commit funding and support for all superintendencies to conduct guided work around disproportionately in disciplinary practices, access to AP and academic enrichment programs, and other areas
- Ensure the proper collection of data on students' ethnic groups and publicly report disaggregated data in order to identify and address inequities across ethnic groups.
- Commit funding and support for community building and engagement in all districts with the goal of developing integration plans reflective of the 5 Rs.



## #FUND SCHOOLS NOW

**Close the resource gap and provide all students with the small classes, enrichment, hands-on education and care that all youth deserve.**

We must fund schools now, and we must do so using sources our city and state have neglected to use in the name of austerity. Educational austerity measures are part of the educational racism apparatus. Across the city, state and nation, politicians send their children to private and selective schools that provide the small classes, enrichment, hands-on education and care that all children deserve, while refusing to invest the same funds in the predominantly Black, Brown and low-income students in public schools. This underfunding holds racial inequity firmly in place by design and political will. In order to truly achieve educational equity for all students, New York must close the resource gap and ensure an equitable distribution of funds to all public schools.

- Fully and immediately fund [Fair Student Funding](#) at 100% for all schools
- Create a commission to review and examine the Fair Student Funding formula, and make recommendations on how to strengthen or overhaul the formula to ensure a more equitable distribution of funds
- Fully support and advocate to secure the billions of dollars NYC public schools are owed by NY State as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity
- Commit to joining the fight for increased revenues in NYS by taxing the ultrawealthy. Support the following package of revenue options supported by the Invest in our NY Coalition- <https://investinourny.org/>



## #EVERY AND ALL SCHOOLS GREAT SCHOOLS

- Conduct a full review of the Department of Education funding from all sources and require the DOE to make its finances more transparent
- Fully fund the school capital plan to eliminate school overcrowding, allow for class size reduction, and upgrade all facilities to be mold-, asbestos- and lead-free, properly ventilated and accessible to students with disabilities
- Greatly expand and increase funding for Community Schools
- Greatly expand and increase funding for adult education and family literacy programs
- Provide ongoing training to all teachers around age-appropriate, evidence-based literacy instruction that is grounded in the science of reading and ensure all students who need extra help in reading can access evidence-based literacy interventions
- Decrease class sizes to a maximum of 18:1 in elementary schools and 22:1 in middle and high schools with no more than 66 students per teacher
- Increase daily access for all students to visual and performing arts, technology, sports, cooking, life skills, health and wellness, and other non-academic classes
- Implement a comprehensive, research-based strategy for strengthening instruction in struggling schools, including Lead Teachers, common planning time, expanded learning time and more
- Provide a well-functioning laptop to every NYC student who needs one
- Expand P-TECH schools and other career/technical education programming
- Expand work-based learning opportunities
- Provide universal 3K, beginning with historically marginalized communities
- Offer age-appropriate comprehensive sex education for all students that is inclusive of all students across various gender and sexuality spectrums
- Provide clean, lead-free water fountains and better food options that include healthy lunches with fresh fruit and vegetables as well as halal lunch
- Stock middle and high school bathrooms with free menstrual products
- Support a transition to a system of performance-based, portfolio and alternative assessments instead of high-stakes standardized testing, to ensure accountability for educating a wide

## #INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

### All education policies and investments must center and prioritize students who have historically been the most marginalized and neglected in the school system.

Education policy in NYC has historically marginalized students across various identity markers: students with disabilities, English Language Learners, immigrant students, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, students involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system students, undocumented students, overage and undercredited students and students in racially and economically marginalized communities. Their experiences and resilience in such a system inform our collective definitions of inclusion and equity and we ought to be more responsive as a result. When these students are addressed, it is usually in an afterthought. We call for a school system that puts the needs of these aforementioned students FIRST in all decisions, and defines their well-being and success as the measure of a strong school system.

- Provide [universal afterschool programs](#), especially for students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and students with limited financial means
- Provide school- and shelter-based social work services to support the education of students experiencing homelessness
- [Guarantee transportation](#) so students in foster care can remain in their schools
- Ensure that all schools and Family Welcome Centers honor the rights of students in temporary housing; provide training on the McKinney-Vento Act, which allows for the waiving of proof of address and immunization requirements in certain cases, among other stipulations
- Expand college access through training for educators on opportunities and access for marginalized populations
- Increase the number of Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) slots offered to parenting students, and implement comprehensive training for school personnel on the legal rights of pregnant and parenting students
- Provide re-engagement options for older youth without a high school diploma, and expand adult literacy education (ABE, HSE, ESOL) for families and community members

## #INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

### Students with Disabilities

We call for an end to ableism in NYC schools and to the segregation, stigmatizing, warehousing, invisibilizing, neglect, and criminalizing of students with disabilities.

- Provide all students with disabilities the instruction, related services and special education supports that they have the right to receive
- Stop the over- and under-referral, and the racial disproportionality of referrals of students to special education, through clear guidance, training and support for all school staff
- Clear the backlog in special education evaluations by expanding the amount of IEP teachers, social workers and school psychologists assigned to each school.
- Provide a preschool special education classroom seat for every child who needs one
- Provide all students with disabilities with the transition supports required by law to prepare them for life after high school (ie. financial literacy, independent living skills, and college and career planning)
- Fill the shortages of special education teachers, paraprofessionals and related service providers, especially bilingual special education teachers and providers
- Expand specialized programs such as the ASD Nest and Horizon programs for students with autism and bilingual special education programs, especially in low-income communities of color
- Require the inclusion of students with disabilities in all school activities and events so that they may participate with their peers to the fullest extent
- Fund related-services programs in schools so that parents and caregivers are not forced to seek those services through other outside contractors or out of the district
- Ensure that students with disabilities receive positive behavioral supports and are not suspended or disciplined for behavior exhibited as a result of their disability, by providing ongoing training, coaching, and monitoring of school staff
- Increase hiring of individuals with disabilities and provide students with disabilities a pathway to a career in education, so that students with disabilities can receive support and educational services from educators with disabilities

## English Language Learners (ELL) and Immigrant Families

The city's neglect and disregard for NYC's immigrant students has condemned many of them to failure in the school system: English Language Learners currently have the highest dropout rate of any student population in NYC, despite the fact that when given the right support, they outperform native English-speaking students. It is time to end policies that exclude and silence English Language Learners and immigrant families, and fully fund programs and services that meaningfully educate and engage newcomer immigrant students and caregivers.

- Improve graduation rates for English Language Learners and expand access to higher education by offering quality programs and expanding access to supportive high school programs for newcomer and undocumented students that meet their needs<sup>1</sup>
- Fully fund bilingual and dual language programs from 3K to 12th grade in all languages spoken in school communities and ensure that all MLLs are guaranteed a seat<sup>2</sup>
- Address the shortage of bilingual and ENL teachers as well as bilingual social workers and service providers.
- Provide digital readiness, adult literacy and family supports to help immigrant families integrate into their communities and schools.
- Fully fund and expand translation and interpretation services to support the diverse NYC immigrant population including languages of limited diffusion<sup>3</sup>
- Provide funding to develop and launch language services coops for African Languages of Limited Diffusion (LLDs), for Asian LLDs, for indigenous Latin American LLDs, and for deaf immigrant students.
- Ensure that English Language Learners have access to all educational enrichment and advancement opportunities provided to English proficient students
- Implement an accountability mechanism and enforce laws requiring accurate assessment and identification of English Language Learners with disabilities, including translation and interpretation services for the IEP process, Section 504 plans and other documents
- Promote completion of the NYS Seal of Biliteracy to ensure that more English Language Learners and former ELLs attain this recognition upon graduation

<sup>1</sup> To do so, the NYCDOE must increase MLL access to transfer schools, night schools and college prep programs across all boroughs.

<sup>2</sup> Fewer than 17% of all English Language Learners are currently enrolled in bilingual education programs, showing a dramatic decline in enrollment over the past decade, in spite of research showing that MLLs enrolled in bilingual education outperform their peers in monolingual programs. Bilingual education is a right for English Language Learners.

<sup>3</sup> Languages of Limited Diffusion are languages in a geographic area where the population of speakers is relatively small, yet those speakers have an equal right for language access. There is limited availability of interpreters for those languages, and for training, hiring and testing opportunities for those LLD interpreters.

## Engage youth as key partners in decision making at all levels.

Youth<sup>1</sup> leaders have been on the cutting edge of social justice policy and activism throughout this country's history, yet their voices are perhaps the most marginalized. In New York City, youth leaders have organized, made policy recommendations and attempted to work within the system, but city leadership has consistently ignored their advocacy. As those most directly impacted by the decisions about their education, it is crucial that students have a meaningful voice in shaping their future beyond the existing structures for youth representation that provide only decorative or tokenized opportunities for students.

- Give students voting power, and a means of electing representation on community education councils, the Panel for Education Policy and any other education decision-making bodies
- Invite students to sit in on faculty meetings related to academics and curricula
- Strengthen youth engagement through a full and built-out Borough Student Advisory Council and Chancellor's Student Advisory Council
- Implement the the first School Diversity Advisory Group report's adopted [Student Empowerment](#) recommendations, including developing a student General Assembly with representation from every high school and a Student Leadership Team that meets regularly with the Chancellor
- Engage students in cultivating student agency and understanding their rights within schools
- Provide free unlimited MetroCards for students
- Expand youth-led college access centers using the Student Success Center model
- Provide training and support to schools on student-centered design practices so that they center young people when creating and evaluating programs or courses
- Create a safe space for students to share both positive and negative feedback, especially students of marginalized identities such as students of color, documented and undocumented immigrant students, and transgender, gender-nonconforming, and LGBTQ students
- Mandate student representation on the hiring board for new faculty members

<sup>1</sup> <https://teenhealthny.org/>

## #ENGAGED SCHOOLS: #PARENT POWER

### Engage families as key partners in decision making at all levels.

Parent and family engagement is critical to student academic success but over and over again families are left out of decision-making, marginalized, and pushed out of schools. The relationship between parents/families and the school community is not one that should be optional or disposable, yet it often is - exposing an ongoing and unresolved bias about the Black, Brown, immigrant and low-income families that schools serve.

- Make school, district and citywide parent meetings accessible remotely to all parents, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic
- Engage parents in policy development at the school, district and citywide level
- Overhaul and revamp the Division of Family and Community Empowerment to serve parents more effectively; require the division to evaluate central parent engagement efforts and share and report data publicly
- Expand research-based models of transformative, culturally responsive family engagement <sup>1</sup>
- Support and collaborate with Community Education Councils (CECs) as authentic partners, and advocate at the state level for a collaborative process to identify ways to strengthen and empower CECs - while ensuring that CECs reflect the demographics of their communities
- Require and support schools to conduct yearly tours of their neighborhood for school staff, in partnership with parents and neighborhood organizations
- Ensure that school accountability tools require schools to assess the quality of family engagement, with a focus on families who are historically excluded, in order to determine barriers to participation; and support schools to develop an inclusive and welcoming environment for the most marginalized populations of parents
- Equalize Parent Association funding through pooled funds or additional funds to the lowest-income schools

<sup>1</sup> Examples include: [Parent-Teacher Home Visits](#) to strengthen relationships home and school; [Academic Parent-Teacher Teams](#) as a model of parent-teacher conferences; [Parent Mentor Program](#) to train parent volunteers; [Abriendo Puertas](#) for parents of young children; and Parent University that offers classes on topics such as navigating Google classroom and other technology, applying for health insurance, learning English, finding a job, family health and fitness and other topics

## #ENGAGED SCHOOLS: #PARENT POWER

- Require multilingual outreach, interpretation and translation, accessible venues and other practices that facilitate the full participation of English Language Learners and immigrant families, and families of students with disabilities
- Conduct targeted and comprehensive outreach to families of children with disabilities
- Commit funding for parent/guardian training and engagement on anti-racism, implicit bias, CRSE, Restorative Justice, and other equity initiatives.
- Connect parents and families with adult education opportunities that support their learning and leadership
- Ensure access to free or subsidized child care for every family who needs it. Prioritize Black, Brown, low-income and immigrant families and the creation of child care programs in under-served communities.

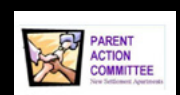


# New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools

## Organizational Support:



Territorial Empathy.



In the beginning of the summer, the Alliance for Quality Education and Public Policy and Education Fund launched a survey with the intent of getting feedback and input from Black and Latinx families, students and educators primarily in New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Kingston, Utica, Albany. We collected 1,046 surveys in English and Spanish. Of the 1,046 survey responses, 80 percent ( 836) were from parents, 10 percent (100) from educators, 5 percent (56) from students and 5 percent (54) by people who identified as “other.”

The survey asked respondents to select their top 5 priorities on how money should be spent from the following list of allowable uses of the new federal funding. Parents, students, and educators around the state overwhelmingly agreed that support staff & mental health, smaller class sizes, technology, infrastructure and summer programs and accelerated learning.

Overwhelmingly, respondents identified hiring more staff to provide mental health support to students and teachers and smaller class sizes as the two most important areas to invest funding. COVID-19 illustrated, and continues to do so, how important mental health is for all people and in particular for the communities that were hit hardest by the pandemic. This is particularly true for New York city students and families which was the epicenter of the pandemic for an extended period of time.

#### **We need mental health supports for students, families & educators:**

It is unsurprising that the survey respondents identified mental health support as one of the most important priorities for using the ARP funding. Many schools and districts did not have nurses, social workers or psychologists before the pandemic, and these disparities were exacerbated once the pandemic hit, especially in NYC.

The DOE aims to have social-emotional supports in place in all schools. Although we applaud this goal, there is no public tracking to monitor DOE’s progress towards hiring 6,000 professionals who work with students to address social-emotional learning needs across the city. We want the DOE to achieve their goal of hiring more social workers, psychologists, and family support workers and would like a public tracking of staff hired and positions still pending to monitor if and when this goal is actualized. Transparency and accountability pave the path to trust among officials and the public.

#### **Culturally Responsive Educational Opportunities:**

We are excited that New York City announced that it will develop a rigorous, inclusive, and affirming curriculum by Fall 2023 – the Universal Mosaic Curriculum. We hope the development and implementation of this curriculum will not be derailed by the upcoming mayoral transition. It is important that multi-year initiatives like this are continued and expanded upon by the new administration. We need more culturally responsive professional development and trainings for educators and support staff.

#### **The fight for smaller class sizes continues:**

Parents, students, and educators identified smaller class sizes as their second most important area to invest. Small class sizes have benefits for learning that are indisputable and often commonsensical. The settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the implementation of the Contract for Excellence specifies goals for New York City to reduce class sizes. When we questioned the DOE on their intentions to meet the goals in the Contract for Excellence we were told they did not have to meet those expectations because the New York State Department of Education did not require it for this year. We then followed up with NYSED and they informed us that they could not require districts to comply with Contract for Excellence because the legislature had maintained language in the budget that did not require NYC to comply with the Contract for Excellence. Whether or not that was the intention of the legislature, it is absolutely necessary to make significant progress towards reducing class size. Blaming one entity over another does not lead to any progress and distracts from the real issue. When class size is reduced, students receive more individualized attention and interact more with the teacher, teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches, and students are less distracting to each other than a large group of children. We urge the NYS legislature to reexamine this section of law and revise the requirements connected to the Contract for Excellence as districts continue to receive increases in Foundation Aid. Also, the legislature needs to continue to ensure that there is meaningful public engagement, one that allows parents and community members to participate with input incorporated in the plans/Contracts for Excellence.

**Our kids need access to devices & high speed internet:**

Respondents identified technology to also be a priority area for investing. After the state shutdown of schools on March 16th, 2020, school districts that had devices for students were able to shift seamlessly to remote/virtual learning. Those who did not had to use paper packages, phones or relied on devices available in the home. As of February 2021 (in the [report](#) published by SED), 14 percent of students in New York City statewide were without access to a dedicated device to do their school work and 13 percent without sufficient internet access. Almost a year after the pandemic hit New York, not having access to technology that is necessary to access one's education seems to be a violation of the constitutionally granted right to "a sound basic education." One of our parent leaders Tanesha Grant saw the need in Harlem to ensure every child had access to a high quality laptop and took it upon herself to do just that. She has since given away more than 300 laptops to children who otherwise might have been forgotten and shows no signs of slowing down. Thank you, Tanesha.

Parents and educators are concerned about the loss of instructional time, academic rigor, and educational support. While some students have kept pace, many more have fallen behind in their academic subjects. There must be a plan in place that is not remediation, but is instead based on accelerated learning that helps students overcome any barriers to their academic success. The plan must also be centered on addressing the social and emotional needs of each and every child and family before we can even begin to assess or think about any testing.

The rest of parents, students, and educators' topline priorities can be found in Alliance for Quality Education's report titled [We Demand: How New York's Communities Want To Use](#)

**New Federal Aid to Public Schools** which you should have received during the hearing in Albany.

AQE was a lead partner in the NY for Racially Just Public Schools, a coalition of groups that created an education justice ([NYRJPS](#)) platform centered in racial justice and equity. We knew how transformative the \$7B in American Rescue Plan funds could be for the students of NYC. We met with DOE, City Council members and Democratic candidates around our demands during the city budget. While NYC put money into some of RJPS demands they fell way short of what a transformative investment should have been. In some areas, such as with English Language Learners and restorative justice programs, the investment was woefully inadequate. However, we were excited to see the \$500 million investment in culturally responsive education that parents of the Coalition for Education Justice had been demanding for two years.

**Let us be clear: Equity and racial justice must be central to these efforts to help ensure that schools do not return to the old systems that did not work for so many of our children.**

**Concerns Grow as Staff Shortage Crisis Looms:**

We are deeply concerned that the recent staffing shortage, accelerated by the vaccine mandate for NYC DOE staff, will have a significant impact on the DOE's initial plans to support and aid students on their road to recovery. The plan to expand literacy coaches and to hire more teachers seems to be derailed by the loss of 5,000 teachers when the vaccine mandate goes into effect on Monday, Oct. 4th as news outlets have reported. We understand the importance of vaccines and keeping everyone safe, but it's worth noting that unvaccinated NYPD and Department of Corrections officers are allowed to stay on duty if they submit to weekly testing, but NYC educators were not offered this option. In the end, it is once again the students who will face the consequences of these decisions.

**Foundation Aid & Fair Student Funding Formulas:**

In regards to Foundation Aid, we are grateful and eager for this increased funding. The commitment to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula allowed NYC to raise all schools to 100% of their Fair Student Funding. But many of the high need schools and District 75 schools were already receiving 100% of their Fair Student Funding allocation. We want to make sure that the most vulnerable students are prioritized as the City distributes school aid. As is true with Foundation Aid, the delays in the full phase-in of this funding at the state and city level, needs to take into consideration that the need of students has increased. Upward adjustments of this funding for the highest needs schools may be necessary. Also, the Fair Student Funding formula, which was created under the leadership of Mayor Bloomberg, needs to be evaluated and updated to ensure that the weights are appropriate and ensure equity in distribution. Mayor deBlasio and the City Council convened a task force in 2019 to examine the formula and offer recommendations, but the task force recommendations were never released publicly.

AQE believes deeply that there must be transparency of and accountability for how the \$7B dollars in federal funds are spent and an honest assessment of impact. This assessment needs



to be ongoing and concurrent with the programs, beginning with Summer Rising and every year until these monies are spent. Parents, educators, community and especially the students of NYC have the right to be able to hold DOE and NYC accountable for how they spend this historic investment.