

***Testimony of Chancellor Richard A. Carranza: New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
Elementary Education***

**Thursday, January 28, 2021**

Good Afternoon Senate and Assembly Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in my capacity as the Chancellor of New York City's Department of Education. Joining me today is Lindsey Oates, our Chief Financial Officer.

It is my honor and distinct pleasure to come before you today to advocate for New York City's public schools, and our students and their families.

Before I begin, I must thank all of our school staff and support staff as well as our parents who have partnered with us to take on a larger role as co-educators throughout this time. This has been a challenging and truly painful time and we are devastated by the lives lost throughout this crisis. Having seen firsthand the incredible resilience and commitment of our DOE staff, students, and families, as well as New Yorkers generally, I know that we will get through this together.

Prior to this pandemic, we had achieved a significant amount, including Pre-K for All and 3-K for All, record high graduation rates experienced by our school district of 78.8 percent, and a deeper commitment to supporting the whole child through expanded access to social emotional learning and mental health supports. Before, during and even after this pandemic, Equity and Excellence for All has and will continue to be my focus. We have and will continue to use that same lens throughout this crisis and beyond.

You have a commitment from me that supporting our students will always come first; And we have stretched every dollar we have to provide for our students.

Within a matter of days after the crisis began, we oversaw the complete transformation of our educational system:

- We created meal hubs, providing 65 million meals to date -- not only to students but to their families and other New Yorkers in need;
- Delivered over 450,000 iPads to our students, with an additional 50,000 devices on the way, bringing learning online for 1.1 million students;
- Established Regional Enrichment Centers, serving almost 14,000 students when school buildings were closed last spring and summer;
- Launched an extensive in-person COVID testing program at schools, in which we now test students and staff each and every week – and we are maintaining very low percent positivity rates demonstrating our steadfast commitment to health and safety in our buildings;
- We provided childcare through the Learning Bridges program when we reopened our buildings; and
- We developed Parent University, which offers programming and learning opportunities to our parents on an ever-expanding catalogue of topics.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has been devastating across our system. It has brought personal loss to so very many in our school communities and across the DOE. It has also meant challenges in continuity of learning at an unprecedented time. That is why we have created a 2021 Student Achievement Plan to confront learning loss and accelerate academic achievement by improving teaching and learning and expanding access to mental health and social-emotional supports across the system.

While we know we have a big and important path ahead, the recommendations found within the Executive Budget fall significantly short of what we need to continue on this path of achievement, success, and excellence, at a time when our students need supports the most.

Last year, New York State reduced School Aid, and amidst tremendous uncertainty, it is troubling to see that this year's Executive Budget proposes similar action. The Executive Budget proposes to reduce State school aid to New York City by \$800 million, abandon \$180 million in cash owed to New York City, and another \$70 million in reimbursement to New York City charter school costs. It further proposes to eliminate approximately \$20 million in State grants which are supporting DOE's work to create teacher pipelines in order to ensure that we have high-quality teachers for our future students. Lastly, in the Executive Budget, New York City was excluded from reimbursement for transportation costs incurred during school building closures.

The federal government allocated one time funding for school districts to help with recovery costs, learning loss and other supports for students. However, the Executive Budget uses this as an opportunity to pass even more cuts onto the City. If the Executive Budget's proposals are accepted, the Department of Education will experience over \$1 Billion in a total reduction of state education funding, and as result, we will not be able to continue to deliver on equity and excellence for all of our students and address the pandemic's longer-term consequences in our schools.

We continue to strive to offer our students an environment and school community that supports their growth, and a future of abundant opportunity. Despite all of our efforts, it is apparent that if we do not receive all forms of aid, including the entirety of the federal stimulus aid **supplementing** our State aid funding, opportunities for our students will be at risk; our reach will be reduced; and our ability to deliver transformative and high-quality education will be on the line.

If balancing the State's budget on the backs of our students and classrooms—many of whom are also the students in need of the greatest support across New York State—is the agenda of the Executive Proposal, then it is ultimately an agenda that I cannot support. We still have so much work to do to ensure that all school communities and buildings can operate safely for all students and staff and recover from this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. We must not be stifled by a continuation of long-standing underinvestment by the Executive. With your support, our partners in the the Legislature, we are confident that we can secure a path toward increasing equity and excellence for the students of New York City.

Notwithstanding our ever-present budgetary concerns, I want to assure you that one thing hasn't changed: our commitment to our mission.

We remain committed to delivering equity and excellence for our students and their families, and to providing all of our school communities, who have been through so much, with the resources and tools they need to support their children's education.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and look forward to your questions.