

SENATOR ROBERT JACKSON
PRESENTS



A Vision for Public Education
in New York State



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	4
Principles of Public Education in New York State	5
Public	5
Equitable	5
Transparent	5
Topics	6
School Funding	6
How Public Schools Receive Money	6
Overview of Funding History in New York State	6
The Fight Ahead	8
Policy Recommendations	8
Fund the Foundation Aid formula	8
Update Foundation Aid formula	8
Consolidate and Streamline Aid Categories	9
Strengthen Expense Based Aid	9
Fund Our Public Universities	9
Revenue Generation	9
How Public Schools Spend Money	10
Non-public schools	11
Charter Schools: Moving Away from Privatization toward Transparency and Accountability	11
Independent Schools: Religious or Secular—a sound basic education for all students	12
School Governance and Assessments	12
Introduction	12
Moving from Mayoral “Control” to Governance and Accountability	13
The Role of Unions	15
Data Collection	15
Assessments	15
Testing and Opt Out	15
Teacher Evaluations	17
SHSAT	18
School Climate: the Ecosystem of Public Education	19
Ecosystems of Equity	19
Systemic Racism and Over-Policing of Public Schools	19
New Approaches to “Discipline”	20
Restorative Justice	21

Social-Emotional Learning	22
Equitable Admissions and School Integration	22
Community Schools: Schools in and of the Community	22
School Based Health Clinics	23
Food and Nutrition	23
Homelessness	24
Mental Health	25
Extracurriculars	26
Learning Differently	26
Differentiated Learning Environments	26
Children with Special Needs	27
Dyslexia	28
Multilingual Learners	29
Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Learners	29
Classrooms for All	29
Early Childhood Education	29
Class size	29
Culturally Responsive Education	30
Teaching Financial Literacy	30
Arts Education	31
Civic Education	31
Conclusion	32

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Introduction

I am only able to share this vision because of you. This paper is the product of our shared struggle. As my staff and I have assembled this vision, we have interacted with so many allies: friends from the PTA, from neighborhood politics, and from organizations all across New York State that have supported our fight for fair funding. All of you have a piece in this vision. The discussions we have had, the endless meetings we have attended, the rallies we have organized—all done for our children. I thank you for walking this road with me.

This paper is currently a draft plan of the fights and solutions we need to focus on over the coming years. As you can see, I have marked it as a draft because we *want* and *need* your input. You have been the warriors in this fight for years, and you have a deep understanding of our schools. Please go through this paper and tell us what you like and do not like, what is clear and what is confusing, what makes sense and what does not add up. We are going to circulate it widely across the state, and we want your input to be included.

Getting this vision right is the first step on a long road—and that road leads to Albany. I have learned that people power is what we need to get results in this fight for our children. In my capacity as a parent activist and State Senator, I will help you organize your trips, and together we can plan which of my colleagues need to hear from our communities. We made gains in 2019. But, with your dedication, we are going to come home with more for our schools in 2020 than ever before.

Principles of Public Education in New York State

The following three principles guide my thinking. These are the unifying concepts in the vision of public education I present in this document, and I will refer to them often in the discussion below. Our education system must be:

Public

We live in a time of intense privatization of resources—land, water, air—and social services—healthcare, state benefits, infrastructure. Education, too, has fallen prey to the trend toward privatization in many ways. **Public** means open and accessible to all. It means free of charge. It means welcoming the rich and the poor, the black and brown and white, and people across the spectrums of ability, gender, and sexuality. These values are enshrined in the New York State Constitution, which calls for the legislature to provide for “a system of free common schools, wherein all the children of this state may be educated.”¹ I believe that the private market has no place in the public education system; the charter school movement, with a few exceptions, has proven itself to be a playground for wealthy profiteers and the hedge fund industry. Our public education system deserves robust resources precisely because it is public.

Equitable

In a perfect world, a truly public education system would also be equitable. But we don’t live in a perfect world, so I think it’s important to state **equity** as a principle in its own right. Equity is different from equality, where everyone is treated the same. Equity instead is the idea that all students should receive the individual support they each need to succeed. As I describe below, systemic racism pervades our public education system, disadvantaging students of color from the outset. Equity is about closing the opportunity gap across socioeconomic lines. I deliberately adopt this framing of opportunity gap to avoid the misinformed framing of “achievement gap” that fails to recognize that the game is rigged before our students can even play. Equity realized in our public education system means that the system works for all children, it meets them where they are regardless of ability, race, class, or gender.

Equity instead is the idea that all students should receive the individual support they each need to succeed.

Transparent

Flowing from the importance of **public** education, I also believe that the system should be transparent. This is important for two reasons. First, the only way for the system of public education to be accountable is for it to be transparent so that its workings are clear to those in charge of oversight and accountability so resources are not lost down the drain. We will continue to push initiatives that drag the financial workings of the charter industry into the sunlight for close examinations by parents, community leaders and government. Public schools must also be accountable for their procurement practices, which only happens through transparency. Second, a transparent system is an accessible system. All stakeholders of public education should be able to understand how the system works with a little effort so they can get involved at the ground level. Understanding public education should not require a doctorate in the field or decades of activism with a parent advocacy group or a union.

¹ The New York State Constitution, Article XI, Section 1.

Topics

School Funding

How Public Schools Receive Money

Education, like any public good, costs money. Most of the ideas contained in the second and third sections of this platform can only come to pass if we truly prioritize education funding. As it stands, there is a multi-billion dollar gap between how much New York State spends on education and the needs of our students.² This gap has existed for a long time, and it falls unevenly for different districts and schools in the state. My first time taking on this gap came when I helped found the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) that included community school boards, advocates, and parents of students in the New York State Public school system who were all fighting for the right of students to receive a sound basic education. Since that lawsuit, which I describe below, I have fought tirelessly for education funding and will continue to do so in my role as a parent activist and New York State Senator.

Overview of Funding History in New York State



In this section, I clarify the problem of education funding, describe some attempts to solve that problem, and offer my proposals moving forward. There are broad needs for students across our state. From 2007–2017, the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch climbed by 15%, English language learners by 18%, and students with disabilities by 14%. In that ten-year period, that means 45,000 more students were identified with disabilities, 183,000 more students qualified for free or reduced lunch, and 36,000 more students used English language learner programs.³ From the 2014–15 budget year to the 2019–20 school year, the average overall aid increase was 4.7%. While those were significant increases, they pale in comparison to the basic

needs that school districts face across the state that were already unmet back in 2007 and have only been rising in the past decade.

There are more demands on schools to prepare students to graduate from high school and be college- or career-ready, to address the growing number of students with mental health needs, and to keep schools safe and secure while having a healthy learning environment for all students. These major issues cannot be addressed without appropriate school funding from federal, state, and local sources. While there have been some increases in state funding the past few years, Foundation Aid—the backbone of addressing student needs—remains significantly underfunded.

I first became involved in the fight for education funding through my role as President of Community School Board 6 in Northern Manhattan. Overcrowding and budget cuts motivated me to form CFE with attorney Michael Rebell, The Hispanic Federation, New York Communities for Change, and Citizen Action of New York, and others. In 1993, we filed a lawsuit against New York State alleging two things:

- 1) The underfunding of New York City schools directly impacted students of color, who represented 84% of the students attending public schools in New York City; and
- 2) Schools were being underfunded by millions of dollars as a result of the state's formula, which allocated the same percentage to New York City schools every year without regard for students' special circumstances.



² The latest shortfall between the amount needed to meet the Foundation Aid formula and the amount allocated in the budget we passed in 2019 is \$3.4 billion, or \$3,400,000,000.

³ Data come from two government sources: NYSED's database publicly accessible at <https://data.nysed.gov/> and the Council on Children and Families' Kids' Well Being Indicators Clearinghouse at https://www.nyskwic.org/get_data/.

During the 13-year fight that ensued, our lawsuit went through the Supreme Court, the Appellate Division, and the Court of Appeals three different times. We won the case in 2006. In 2007, Governor Spitzer and the legislature agreed to implement the Foundation Aid Formula. They determined the cost of providing students in New York City with a **sound basic education** and developed a formula that would ensure this opportunity for the rest of New York State. This legislation not only required an annual increase in the budget of New York State school districts, but also that New York State gradually phase in the money year-by-year that had been owed to schools in the previous years. With this victory, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity united all education advocates across the state and dispelled the idea that school funding is a battle between upstate and downstate or urban, suburban, and rural districts. The inadequacy and inequitable distribution of school funding is a major issue for all public schools state-wide.

With this victory, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity united all education advocates across the state and dispelled the idea that school funding is a battle between upstate and downstate or urban, suburban, and rural districts.

The CFE decision forced the state to use a real method to calculate the exact funds needed by schools to provide a sound basic education. According to our CFE counsel Michael Rebell, the State had never before then completed an objective analysis of the exact amounts needed. The Foundation Aid Formula better reflects the needs of our students and is based on metrics including: free and reduced priced meals, English language learner rates, census poverty, and sparsity of the population. The Foundation Aid Formula had a great start in 2007 and was supposed to be phased in over four years. But the financial crisis—caused by greedy and predatory banks, hedge funds and other financial institutions—derailed the important progress we had made and slowed the flow of needed funding.

Since 2011, the governor and legislature have increased state education funding, but never enough to meet the needs of children and educators across the state. Many of us have been participants in these bitter battles for funding and have come away proud of the fight but disappointed in the results. The formula has informed the governor's decisions about education funding, but it has not been used as rigidly as we need, nor has the formula been treated as law. In fact, Education Law § 3602 requires the state to use the Foundation Aid Formula to determine funding levels for public schools. Its status as law is clear, as is the state's violation of that law in funding practices of the past decade.

It particularly affected the districts with the highest needs, but every school district felt the effects because the predictability and stability they had hoped for from the Foundation Aid Formula was gone again. Particularly egregious are the funding patterns for 25 school districts statewide that are considered "high-need." The Alliance for Quality Education has shown that these districts represent 80% of New York State's Black and Latinx students, and 69% of our students living in poverty. New York City schools are owed \$1.4 billion, or roughly \$1,375 per student. In the 31st Senate District I represent, our schools are owed \$46 million.⁴ Our children have paid the price for the bad decision-making regarding education funding, and it is now our collective responsibility to fix it across our state.

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Indeed, in a further legal challenge, a coalition of education groups sued New York alleging that the State has failed to fully fund schools pursuant to the Court of Appeals decisions in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity litigation. The plaintiffs claim that the state is not providing students nearly \$4.8 billion in state aid because of the state's "gap elimination adjustment" and failure to provide sufficient funding for its foundation formula.⁵ The Court of Appeals ruled that the plaintiffs could not rely on the CFE ruling or the 2007 funding formula for more statewide funding. Instead, the Court said that the plaintiffs would have to prove that a lack of funding was causing harm in school districts. The Court remanded this part of the case to

⁴ These data can be easily found on AQE's website: <https://www.aqeny.org/school-district-owed/>.

⁵ See a summary of the case on NYSER's website: http://nyser.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NYSER_Case_Summary.pdf

the Supreme Court for trial, and the case is now in the discovery phase.⁶ Fights in the courts are important fronts to keep open as we continue to demand full funding of public education from the legislative and executive branches.

Our schools are depending on this aid to reduce class sizes; provide more course selection and spaces dedicated to science, art, and college prep courses; and increase access to guidance counselors and social workers. Well-funded schools attract stronger teachers and diverse specialties that ensure our children receive the services and education they need and deserve.

The Fight Ahead

The next state budget can put us on track for fiscal equity and stronger schools if we can build a strong coalition of partners to make it happen. Parents and advocates in this annual struggle have several organizational allies. The state Parent Teacher Association, the state teachers' union NYSUT, the New York State School Board Association, the "Big 5" school districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, and New York City), and school superintendents and administrators are all important allies in this funding fight. Their coalition, called NYS Educational Conference Board, has strong, historic ties with state legislators. The New York State Board of Regents and Commissioner also strongly supported funding increases in line with other advocates, and having a united front with their support is crucial in the fight ahead.

It is the voice of parents, volunteers, community members, grassroots groups like the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), and students that provide the heart and soul of the movement. We are people on the ground, in the schools, and in our communities who have to struggle when state government turns its back on our children and does not give our schools the money they need and deserve. That is why our united collective action—in our schools, with our neighbors, and in meetings with decision makers—is so important in the fight to win more Foundation Aid.

Policy Recommendations

Fund the Foundation Aid formula



Our schools across the state are owed about \$4 billion in Foundation Aid. Some advocates are calling for a minimum increase of \$1.3 billion in Foundation Aid next year. This will bring us 1/3 of the way home to full Foundation Aid and sets the standard for the next two years so we can be fully funded by 2022. This education funding has to be our main budget priority next year.

When that \$4 billion is fully in place, a 2018 report by the state Education Department estimated the benefit to high needs districts would be about \$2.7 billion, average needs districts \$871 million and low need districts \$294 million.⁷ Think of the advances our schools could make with that funding.

Update Foundation Aid formula

The Foundation Aid formula needs some updating in two main areas. First, consensus is emerging among state legislators that we have to look at the cost-per-pupil formula, which is now 12 years old. Second, I do believe we can develop a better way of assessing student needs in districts, especially in urban and rural areas with high concentrations of poverty. However, I reject arguments that the Foundation Aid formula is not working. The truth is that we cannot even evaluate the success or failure of the Formula because it has not been fully funded.

⁶ The full text of the decision can be read in [Aristy-Farer v. State of New York, 29 NY3d 501 \(N.Y. 2017\)](#). A summary of the decision can be found in Harris, Elizabeth A. "New York's Top Court Narrows Suit Seeking More Money for Schools." *The New York Times*, 27 June 2017.

⁷ See the Educational Conference Board recommendations for the budget approved in 2019, retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1f5af2_f24a122ad56f4f05aee0c391fb87ba6d.pdf.

I reject arguments that the Foundation Aid formula is not working. The truth is that we cannot even evaluate the success or failure of the Formula because it has not been fully funded.

Consolidate and Streamline Aid Categories

As we update the Foundation Aid formula, we also need to take a hard look at the proliferating categories of aid that have snowballed over the last several decades. This system of adding new aid categories is due for a massive overhaul in line with a consistent vision of public education like the one I present here. Each aid category should be clearly identifiable in purpose and destination to provide stakeholders with a transparent system of funding. With this transparency in place, it will be more difficult for elected representatives and their appointees to “play politics” with education funding. This transparency will also make it easier to engineer an equitable system. One aid category could serve the more than 243,000 students in our schools across the state for whom English is not their first language.⁸ Another could focus on funding college and career readiness opportunities, including skilled trades and growing technological industries. Teachers and staff should also receive a dedicated funding stream for professional development so they can succeed in the increasingly complex learning environment of today’s public schools.

Strengthen Expense Based Aid

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) estimates \$400 million is needed annually to reimburse essential programs and services, such as student transportation, special education, and technology investments. We must provide that full amount in order to keep these programs and services running for our students.

Fund Our Public Universities

While we strengthen the funding for K-12 education, we also must fulfill the promise for excellent public higher education for which New York is known worldwide. Our public university systems, CUNY and SUNY, require massive investments. The *floor* of what we must do includes closing the gap between the Tuition Assistance Program amount and the cost of tuition at CUNY schools, which is called the TAP gap. We must also commit to maintenance of effort, indicating no cuts to operating expenses provided by the State. The crisis of adjuncts without living wages or benefits must end by our commitment to provide these teaching jobs with dignity. Finally, we must set aside money for remedial education courses that our students entering CUNY must often take while we focus on improving the quality of K–12 education in New York City and State. Our students deserve world-class educational opportunities after graduation, and CUNY and SUNY stand ready to deliver if we provide them with the necessary resources.⁹

Revenue Generation

We must prioritize funding education within our existing budget framework and support common-sense revenue generating policies that can increase our state’s capacity to fund education and other public goods. Some of these ideas include a pied-à-terre tax on absentee owners in New York City, a higher income tax for the wealthiest in our state, and a smarter and modernized property tax structure to stabilize and make more predictable the education revenues across New York State. We know that the wealthiest New Yorkers will raise every objection they can to tax increases. But the vast majority of us have come to see one of the biggest flaws in our society is that those at the top are not paying their fair share. The fight to raise revenue goes hand-in-hand with the fight for our children’s future.



⁸ See n. 2 above

⁹ The #DegreesNYC campaign has a blueprint for collective action focused on New York City that contains many of these ideas and more. Read their [Executive Summary](#) for more details.

We must prioritize funding education within our existing budget framework and support common-sense revenue generating policies.

As activists and advocates, we must be prepared for this upcoming and future legislative sessions. Understanding the various forms of school funding strengthens our ability to bring more of our friends and neighbors into this fight—and makes advocating for our children a more powerful tool to get the resources we need and deserve.

How Public Schools Spend Money

As our fight directs more revenue to public schools, we need to ensure it is carefully managed for our children. There are several problems with school spending as it stands now in New York City and the state. Not all the stakeholders have influence over school spending, let alone access to the resources to understand the processes at work. Specifically, there is a lack of transparency in many cases about contractor selection processes, leading to a lack of oversight and accountability. Concerning the allocation of space within school buildings, a miscounting of specialty and therapeutic facilities inside New York City schools has led to overcrowding of classrooms and the infamous closets and hallways where some students receive essential services because providers have nowhere else to go.¹⁰

All of these issues with how school funding is spent have provided a convenient smokescreen for Governor Cuomo to argue that the problem is not the overall education funding shortfall, but a maldistribution within school districts. We know this is not true; these issues are symptoms of the problem—a lack of transparency.

The Contracts for Excellence (C4E) program was created in 2007 by the state legislature to direct funds going to New York City public schools toward the areas of greatest need and increase transparency.¹¹ It was intended to reduce class size, help restructure middle and high schools, and provide full-day pre-K, among other goals. The money flowing through C4E was mandated to supplement other funds rather than replace or supplant, ensuring additional resources for English Language Learners, students with disabilities, those in poverty, and those at risk of not graduating. Unfortunately, the timing of this law right before the 2008 Recession meant that its implementation has not been true. In the 2020 legislative session, we must amend the C4E law to require the New York City Department of Education implement smaller class sizes and strengthen the mandate that C4E implementation in high needs districts occur with community input.¹²

In its ideal form, C4E provides a useful model for what I envision: a transparent system of planning, executing, and reporting expenses that follow state-mandated guidelines to provide more resources to higher-need schools while allowing districts the necessary flexibility to adapt spending to their particular needs. This kind of upstream guidance for funding is an important component for a successful model of how schools spend money.

Another component of that model is a downstream body that can aid the public in providing accountability and oversight. Senator Liz Krueger has introduced legislation, [S3287](#), to create a Legislative Budget Office (LBO) modeled after the successful federal Congressional Budget Office and the New York City Independent Budget Office (NYC IBO). I would offer some friendly amendments to this bill to increase its service to the public in addition to the non-partisan support it would provide state legislators. In particular, the reporting on education spending that the NYC IBO provides annually has been an important resource for education activists of all stripes and is something I would hope to see replicated at the state level.

10 See, for example: Chapman, Ben. "Mayor de Blasio must help 575,000 kids in overcrowded NYC public schools, pols, parents and advocates charge." *New York Daily News*, 26 Oct. 2018.

11 All New York State contracts for excellence through 2018 can be found on NYSED's webpage at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/C4E/>.

12 Advocates recommended that these changes be made in the state budget in March 2019. See, for example: <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/C4E-letter-to-Shelley-Mayer-3.7.19.pdf>

Non-public schools

Charter Schools: Moving Away from Privatization toward Transparency and Accountability

Charter schools arose out of a desire for parents to intervene in the education of their students, providing a point of entry for innovative approaches that fit the needs of a given community better than a state-mandated curriculum. These schools receive state funding and resources to educate their students. In NYC alone, more than \$2.1 billion is diverted annually from our public schools to charters, and more than \$100 million in Department of Education funds to help pay for their space in private buildings, while too many of our public schools remain underfunded and overcrowded. Charter schools are also able to receive private funding. We need look no further than the Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos herself, whose personal fortune is deeply entangled in charter school investments. Large charter networks backed by these privatizing forces have formed in New York State, eating away at resources intended for public education while failing to close the opportunity gap any more effectively than public schools.

We have to press “pause” on the expansion of these charter school networks. I acknowledge that some charter schools are not interested in expanding and adhere to the original intent of the charter laws by offering communities an educational approach that public schools do not provide, but too many charters have gone to school networks with a predatory approach to public education. In New York City, especially, charter networks compete with public schools for space and services within public school buildings at taxpayers’ expense. These large networks are also siphoning students away from public schools, and then too many of these charter schools selectively counsel out students with higher needs who are not cost-effective for charter schools to educate. Public schools cannot turn those students away like charter schools can and, adding insult to injury, the funding does not immediately come back to public schools when students return after being counseled out.

We have to press “pause” on the expansion of these charter school networks.

From a policy perspective, we need to hold charter schools accountable to the public good. I have a bill with Assembly Member Rodnyse Bichotte, [S3334A/A3289](#), that aims to do just that. Each part of this bill extends common-sense transparency standards to charter schools, including:

- a requirement that financial and academic impact assessments be conducted before any charter can be authorized;
- a mandate to display the charter and policies of a given charter school on its website, along with a procedure to file complaints and appeals;
- a requirement that, among other things, charter schools improve student achievement and maintain similar enrollment profiles to district public schools in order to be eligible to renew their charter;
- a suspension policy mirroring that of public schools including full-time alternative instruction, as well as the requirement that students receive all the due process rights of public school students when it comes to disciplinary issues; and
- a charter school report card similar to the publicly-available assessments of public schools.



In addition, NYC must no longer be required to provide charter schools with public school space or help pay their rent in private space, as no other district in the state or indeed the country has these obligations. NYC must receive reimbursement for the funding public schools lose through charter school expansion, as every other district in the state receives.

This bill will allow small-scale charter schools already serving the public good to

continue to flourish, while bringing bad actors among the larger charter networks in line with the standards we have come to expect of public schools in New York State.

I have also introduced legislation that will revert failed charter schools back to traditional public schools. Such a law will allow us to end the churn created in some school buildings where a new charter picks up the failed charter's space, only to fail itself and perpetuate the cycle.

Independent Schools: Religious or Secular—a sound basic education for all students

I believe in the right of all parents to choose the educational opportunities they think are best for their children. At the same time, I join many education advocates who have concerns about religious and private schools for two main reasons: 1) a lack of transparency or accountability for those non-public schools that receive some form of public support; and 2) the ill-defined “substantial equivalency” concept that denies some children the opportunity to achieve a sound basic education.

Some non-public schools, in particular many Orthodox yeshivas, receive state public funding through programs including Mandated Services Aid and vouchers, but face no oversight or reporting mandates for their use of those funds.¹³ I support legislation that would require these non-public schools receiving state funding to account for their uses of it and prove they meet the threshold to receive a Basic Education Database System (BEDS) code. To that end, my bill [S6589](#) would require a state standards report be filed by all non-public schools so these evaluations can more easily be performed.

Regarding the instruction students in nonpublic schools receive, there has long been a requirement of “substantial equivalency,” the statutory obligation for non-public schools to provide an education that is at least substantially equivalent to the instruction provided to public school students. In November 2018, NYSED released updated guidance for substantial equivalency of non-public schools. A court struck down NYSED's new guidance in April 2019 and, as of the time of this writing, the Board of Regents are set to discuss a [new regulation](#) in late 2019. I join a broad coalition of elected public officials and community advocates in support of this regulation. The key features include: (1) recommending that new schools are reviewed within three years of opening and that existing non-public schools be reviewed by the end of the 2022-2023 school year or as soon as practicable and regularly thereafter; (2) requiring local school districts to annually file a list of non-public schools every September 1 starting in 2020; (3) requiring local school districts to file an annual update concerning the status of substantial equivalency reviews every September 1 starting in 2024; (4) providing due process to non-public schools throughout the substantial equivalency process; (5) allowing an integrated curriculum that incorporates multiple subjects into the content of a course; and (6) clarifying that state-approved private special education schools, state-supported schools, and state-operated schools are not subject to substantial equivalency reviews because there are already subject to review by NYSED.¹⁴ Taken together, this proposed regulation will help ensure that non-public schools provide a sound basic education to all their students.

School Governance and Assessments

Introduction

The next piece of my vision for public education deals with how we run the public schools we fund. Transparency is key here. In public education, many well-intentioned systems have arisen over the years that present an alphabet soup of acronyms and structures, which parents and others have to decipher. This barrier to entry deters the involvement of key stakeholders like parents and students themselves. In addition, the move to privatize public education has been felt strongly in the shift of governance structures away from these stakeholders and our union siblings and toward executives who may not always have the best interests of our students at heart. The rise of education corporations that coincides with the uptick in high-stakes testing is just one such example I cover below. Overall, I recommend policy changes that rekindle and re-empower community ownership of public education while reducing the corporate overreach of high-stakes testing and data-mining.

¹³ Partlan, Alisa. “Non-Equivalent: The State of Education in New York City's Hasidic Yeshivas.” (2017). Young Advocates for a Fair Education (Yaffed).

¹⁴ The newly proposed Substantial Equivalency regulations can be viewed [here](#) and have ID No. EDU-27-19-00010-P

Moving from Mayoral “Control” to Governance and Accountability

New York City schools have undergone a transition in governance over the past 20 years. Prior to the current system of mayoral control, school systems were influenced by 32 elected Community School District Boards and a central Board of Education, the members of which were elected by voters until 1999, then appointed by the mayor or state executive officials. The mayor appointed two members of the board and each borough president appointed one, for a total of seven members. Until 1996, Community School District Boards had control over elementary and middle schools, including the hiring of superintendents and their choices of principals, while the Board of Education elected the chancellor and had authority over high schools.

New York City schools have been under mayoral control since 2002, a system in which the mayor appoints the chancellor, as well as nine members of the 15-member Panel for Education Policy (PEP). Each borough president receives one of the remaining five appointees to the PEP, the panel responsible for approving standards and policies that are directly related to educational performance. As of March 2019, there will be one member of the PEP elected by Community Education Council presidents and another one appointed by the mayor. In essence, this system of mayoral control places full responsibility of all education matters in the hands of the mayor, the mayor-appointed chancellor and a panel on which the mayor has a majority influence. New York City is not unique in this regard, with a strong trend toward mayoral control in major cities across the U.S. since the 1990s. In Chicago, New Haven, and Hartford, the mayor has similar powers. Washington, D.C. is under full mayoral authority. In contrast, Los Angeles United School District is still run by a superintendent appointed by an elected, seven-member Board of Education. Bayonne, NJ also voted to convert from an appointed board to an elected board in 2015. In addition, there are strong moves **away** from mayoral control in Detroit, Newark, Philadelphia, and Chicago in recent years.

Mayoral control has some advantages over less centralized and more horizontal governance structures. First, a vision for a public school district is, in theory, easier to implement when the authority is vested in one figure. Mayoral control can thus be understood to clear administrative “roadblocks” that some reformers argue get in the way of transformative change in public education. By the same token, there are also clear lines of accountability for failures that lead back to the chancellor and, ultimately, the mayor.

However, I have long maintained that mayoral control is a flawed system that needs reform urgently. Some stakeholders, including UFT, have echoed this view since the late 2000s.¹⁵ And now, a growing consensus of education advocates and elected public officials are coming together to ask for reforms to NYC school governance at the state level, as we heard in public testimony delivered at hearings on the issue just this year.¹⁶ The bottom line is that mayoral control is a dictatorship that leaves too many important voices out of the conversation about how we run our schools. We need more democracy in school governance, a system of mayoral *accountability* with key democratic checks to the mayor’s power at the city and local levels.

In consultation with key stakeholders and excellent research compiled over the past 17 years of mayoral control, I suggest we re-introduce community authority in some specific forms. First, the PEP must be substantially reformed beyond the cosmetic changes made during the 2019 state budget negotiations. We must: 1) end mayoral majority on the PEP by replacing some of those seats with appointees of the City Council, the Public Advocate, and the Comptroller; 2) require that a majority of PEP members have recent experience as parents of public school students; 3) replace the practice of “serving at the pleasure” with fixed two-year renewable terms where members are only removable for cause; and 4) expand the PEP from 15 to 19 members to include parent representatives of English Language Learners (ELLs) and children with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as well as two voting student members. The Chancellor must also be selected through a process of advice and consent that includes the PEP. The PEP must be a true check on the mayor’s authority that derives its legitimacy from the experience of parents of public school students.

¹⁵ United Federation of Teachers School Governance Committee. “Ensuring an Effective School Governance Framework.” (2009).

¹⁶ Amin, Reema. “Parents, advocates, and some state senators weigh limits to mayoral control of New York City schools.” *Chalkbeat*, 15 Mar. 2019.

The bottom line is that mayoral control is a dictatorship that leaves too many important voices out of the conversation about how we run our schools.

At the level of community school districts (CSDs), I am encouraged at the shift that will occur in 2021 to majority parent-elected members of Community Education Councils (CECs). More changes need to be made, including the addition of student voting members aged 14 and older. In addition, superintendents should serve three-year renewable terms, removable only for cause. CECs should have input on superintendent selection, compiling a list of their top three candidates from whom the chancellor must choose a new superintendent for a given CSD. CECs also should have authority to decide on school closures, openings, and co-locations beyond the formal advisory role they have recently been given. We must implement structural changes that reflect the value we place on the local knowledge of school districts that CECs are expected to possess and provide them the resources to make these decisions soundly.

I take the same approach with school-level structures. School Leadership Teams (SLTs) have been reformed legislatively to guarantee significant access to budgetary information so they can fulfill their statutory role of drafting the School Comprehensive Education Plan and budget. They have also been guaranteed the ability to evaluate candidates for principal and forward a list of recommended candidates to the superintendent who must select one of them. However, the DOE must devote significant resources to empowering SLTs to use these processes for the students' benefit; too often, SLTs do not receive basic training on budget and personnel matters that they need in order to do their jobs, nor are they given fully transparent access to the resources they need like budget spreadsheets and candidate resumes.¹⁷

Under the current system there is little oversight over DOE's procurement process. To render more transparency, there should be a requirement for all contracts to be approved by the city comptroller, as is the requirement for other city agencies. This process ensures the city spends public funds wisely and fairly, and maximizes the efficiency of tax dollars through a bid process that is both competitive and transparent. An audit report released in 2017 by the City Comptroller Scott Stringer revealed that the Department of Education issued \$2.7 billion contracts without a competitive process in fiscal year 2016.¹⁸ According to the audit, the DOE continuously fails to properly oversee its vendors, pays them late, and often instructs them to begin work before proper paperwork has been filed with the comptroller's office. Among the 521 "limited competition" contracts, the city had directed vendors to commence the work before filing appropriate paperwork for 85% of them. In one case, a contract was filed two and a half years after the vendor began the work.¹⁹ For increasing transparency and accountability in the DOE, rules specified in the Procurement Policy Board (PPB) should be applied to the department. The audit discloses that the DOE has yet to fix their inefficient oversight of vendors, despite a 2015 audit urging them to do so. In some cases, "there was no evidence the DOE conducted performance evaluations, as required by the DOE's own procurement rules."

Additionally, all pending contracts should be shared, three weeks prior to voting, with the PEP. This oversight mechanism will provide the panel with adequate time to approve contracts and allocate funds where needs are greatest. It is essential that the public have complete knowledge of where their tax dollars go, thus all contracts also should be made public on the DOE website three weeks prior to the vote barring an emergency situation. Simultaneously, they should be made available for review to the city council and the public advocate. Through this kind of accessibility to the procurement contracts, not only do multiple government bodies maintain checks and balances on the funds allocation of the DOE, but the public has knowledge at the same time as everyone inside government. This system delivers transparency and equity in the dissemination of information regarding what type of contracts are being proposed and exactly

¹⁷ The above recommendations come from the following diverse sources over the past decade: New York City Council Mayoral Control Working Group. "[Summary of New York City Council Mayoral Control Working Group Recommendations](#)." (2009).

United Federation of Teachers School Governance Committee. "[Reforming Mayoral Control](#)." (2013).

New York Public Advocate Letitia James. "[Our Schools, Our Voices: The Future of Mayoral Control in New York City](#)." (2015).

¹⁸ Stevens, Tyrone. "[Comptroller Stringer Investigation: DOE Blatantly Violating its Own Contracting Rules](#)" (2017).

¹⁹ Zimmerman, Alex. "[Audit: NYC issued \\$2.7 billion in noncompetitive education contracts — and often violates its own rules](#)." *Chalkbeat*, 11 Aug. 2017.

what is happening with them. It helps mitigate the shortcomings of contracts being approved after the services have begun at schools or vendors being mishandled when they are asked to work without the contractual approval.

The Role of Unions

New York is a labor state. We are proud of our collective bargaining rights, especially in education-related fields. Our communities benefit when our friends and neighbors have jobs with rights and benefits and a voice at work. The statewide union, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and their largest affiliate, in New York City, are key allies and important voices in the debates and discussions in our communities, school districts and at the state Capitol. Unionized administrators like the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) and the NYS Federation of School Administrators (FSA) share important perspectives. Our goal is always to build the strongest possible working relationships between these educators and the communities they serve and work together on shared issues. We recently won school bus drivers and attendants employee protection provisions in New York City to help strengthen their unions going forward thanks to my bill [S6208](#) that awaits the governor's signature. Members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) are also part of the education union family. Ultimately, I believe the deep roots of unionism in the education fields in New York State can strengthen a vision of public education when unions work together with other stakeholders and the broader communities they serve.

We have seen encouraging examples of this kind of collaboration in the cases of St. Paul, Minnesota and Austin, Texas as detailed by the Schott Foundation. I am also inspired by the community organizing behind the Los Angeles United School District and Chicago strikes earlier this decade. As always, I pledge to support all the workers who keep students as a priority day-in and day-out in our public schools.

Data Collection

In this age of information technology, personal data have become more valuable than ever. Data privacy is an emergent political issue that will only continue to grow, and it has important consequences when we think of public education. School districts keep a tremendous amount of data including parents' contact information and students' ages. The New York City Department of Education for several years had a policy of selling this data to charter school networks eager to siphon students away from public education through targeted mailers. Only in the past two months has DOE changed their policy to offer an opt-out option to parents, and just recently to include languages other than English.

Our children's data are not for sale. Student data are personal and should not be shared unless a parent or guardian consents. I agree with privacy best practices that say such data sharing should be opt-in only. The state student privacy law passed in 2014 was a good start, but it needs to be strengthened and enforced before our children can be ensured of the data privacy they need to succeed. New York can be a leader in responsible policymaking at the intersection of data privacy and public education, and I intend to introduce legislation to position us there in the coming session by amending the current privacy law.

Student data are personal and should not be shared unless a parent or guardian consents.

Assessments

Testing and Opt Out

Testing has become the dominant mode of assessment in our public schools. So many opportunities and consequences have been tied to testing in the past two decades that it is now commonplace to speak of "high-stakes testing." From the micro level of a student's entrance into gifted programs at a young age to the macro level of federal funding and everything in between, testing determines too much in our public education system. Advocates from diverse groups of stakeholders have come together to push back against the dominance of testing, and I join their voices. The outsized influence of testing in New York State results in a profound lack of equity, disadvantaging students of working-class parents who cannot afford supplementary instruction as well as those students who learn and demonstrate knowledge dif-

ferently. In this section, I focus on the damage testing does to students and our public education system at-large before I discuss what alternatives we can provide.

While assessments are important to gauge student progress and ensure schools have the resources to support all residents, the high-stakes nature of testing and the conditions in which those tests are developed and administered have been so perverse that test results have been rendered meaningless. First, New York State contracts with private organizations who design exams and develop and sell the materials needed to teach students how to pass those same exams, creating a corporate influence that badly needs oversight. Second, the exam does not measure intelligence or aptitude; it measures access to resources and opportunities such as test prep courses and tutoring. It does not account for food insecurity, home instability, language barriers, learning disabilities, overcrowded classrooms or learning differences. An overwhelming number of students in the Big 5 either live below the poverty rate, are recent immigrants, and/or have an IEP or learning difference. Using these exams as the measurement of academic success and as a means of admissions essentially locks the majority of students out. As my Chief of Staff Johanna Garcia once said in an interview with Brian Lehrer on WNYC, “The test creates a false narrative of achievement where a student who scores a 4 believes they are smarter than the rest, but really they just had more access to resources.” In a video series with education activists, she later said: “Are our kids smarter or just a little bit more privileged?” Third, research has shown that when so much rides on a test and when the test score becomes the goal of the test, then the mastery or proficiency of its contents becomes irrelevant. This is what advocates mean when they push back against “teaching to the test.”

Another reason testing has become so important is that results are tied to school accountability. The best-known examples are the New York State tests in math and English language arts (ELA) for grades 3–8. The state and often the city use test scores to determine whether or not a school should be on an at-risk list. This year the list is euphemistically called Comprehensive Support and Investment (CSI). Getting placed on the CSI communicates to the school community that the school does not meet satisfactory benchmarks for school performance or accountability. In other words, not enough kids scored “proficient” or showed growth, and the school is essentially put on probation. If it does not change for what is deemed “better,” then it will be at risk of losing funding or even closing.

This approach has a major—and ironic—design flaw. Schools that are deemed at-risk see their enrollment numbers drop, which decreases the school’s per pupil funding. Especially in New York City, when school enrollments go down, the Department of Education and charter school networks decide there is space for a new school in the building, which comes in with brand new equipment and the funds to start up while phasing in students grade by grade. The new school recruits students away from the host public school, further depleting from that public school’s budget. This form of probation leading to charter co-location does not consider the contextual factors that lead a public school to have low test scores in the first place, including funding, class size, and social worker- and guidance counselor-to-student ratio, and after school programs. In this way, the cycle traps public schools in struggle while continuing to starve them the resources they need to break out of that cycle.

Another high-stakes instance of testing is in the admissions process to middle and high schools, especially in New York City. As long as test scores are the gateway to accessing schools or are used by middle or high schools to disqualify students from being considered, we will continue to have segregated public schools because test results measure wealth more accurately than student learning. We will also continue to feed the mentality that test scores measure success, which validates big charter networks that use test scores in their marketing to public school parents.

Until a mindset shift away from testing takes hold in high places, advocates have found a straightforward solution at the core of the Opt Out movement: parents and guardians in New York State have the right to refuse for their children to sit for the state exams without consequence or reprisal. Roughly 20% of parents in New York State opt their children out of the state exams. However, the emphasis on testing at every level of public education has led to hundreds of documented incidents in which teachers or administrators have pressured parents and students out of their rights to opt out.

Parents and guardians in New York State have the right to refuse for their children to sit for the state exams without consequence or reprisal.

We must take the pressure off parents and students, as well as teachers and administrators. My office has received calls and emails from parents all over the state telling us they and their children have been intimidated with undue pressure from school administrators as these well-meaning administrators try to keep their participation rate above the fabled 95% rate that is said to be the federal line in the sand. The parroted line they receive about maintaining a certain participation rate to avoid cuts in federal funding has no basis in the law. A quick glance at the federal ESSA law (Every Student Succeeds Act, the successor to the No Child Left Behind Act) shows that opting out is permitted.²⁰ NYSED also no longer mandates low-participation districts spend money on improving testing rates.²¹ Ultimately, the statutes are clear: parents have the right to opt children out of state testing at no consequence for the student. These stories are heartbreaking because the students most commonly bullied by administrators for opting out are those with special needs and English language learners, whose parents end up frustrated and confused about their rights.

To help support these parents, students, and statewide advocates, I have proposed legislation to codify certain additional rights and policies. This bill, [S5394/A7744](#), is carried by Harvey Epstein in the Assembly. It mandates that schools communicate to parents and guardians in neutral language their right to opt children out of the Math and ELA tests for grades 3–8. This legislation passed in the Senate in June 2019 and I trust it will pass in the Assembly in 2020.

I am filing an amendment to this bill that completes my vision for a robust opt-out mechanism. That amendment will prohibit punitive measures being meted out to parents, teachers, schools, or school districts on account of low participation rates. This provision means administrators cannot pressure teachers or parents because too many children opt out. It also means those administrators don't face the same pressures to achieve high testing rates anymore because their districts will not suffer if they fall below 95%. If parents' requests to opt out students are not honored, this amendment creates a transparent grievance procedure for those parents to follow with the local school board or CEC and the Board of Regents. Taken together, this legislation will go a long way toward breaking the stranglehold that high-stakes testing has on New York State's education system.

Teacher Evaluations

The way we evaluate teachers in New York State has also been perverted by high-stakes testing. Until this legislative session of 2019, teachers of students in grades 3–8 were assessed based on the state exam scores of their students, regardless of whether teachers taught one of the subjects in which students were tested. This assessment mechanism put tremendous pressure on both teachers and students for students to take the state exams and score highly. The newly-elected Democratic majority in the Senate recognized the unsustainability of these pressures and drafted legislation to amend the way teachers are evaluated via the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). While this legislation came from good intentions, it did not do enough to reform APPR. While teachers can no longer be evaluated based on state test scores, the law continues to provide for an alternative assessment to be given to students on which a teacher would be evaluated. This loophole can result in *double* testing of students because they would still be pressured to take the state tests for funding purposes while they take a separate set of exams for teacher evaluation metrics. I support legislation that reduces the sway testing results have over teacher evaluations, further reforming APPR. Until we have a truly equitable education system, we need to account for the totality of circumstances facing teachers including: the amount of students with IEPs and those who are English Language Learners, the socio-economic status of their student body as measured by rates of free and reduced-price lunch, and data on housing insecurity and homelessness in a given school or district. We also need to adopt holistic metrics for student growth that can inform teacher evaluations, including portfolio reviews and other qualitative assessments.

²⁰ The relevant excerpts of federal regulations, including 1111(b)(2)(K), are excerpted at: [Fairtest.org. "Federal Law and Regulations on Opting Out Under ESSA \(Updated February 2018\)." \(2017\).](#)

²¹ NYSED referred to the removal of this requirement that school districts spend money to improve testing rates in a public presentation available [here](#). See Slide 5 in particular, retrieved from [here](#).

Until we have a truly equitable education system, we need to account for the totality of circumstances facing teachers.

SHSAT

One function of high-stakes testing is in the form of entrance exams. The Specialized High School Admissions Test in New York City, known by its acronym SHSAT, is one such high-stakes test that has risen to the fore in 2019 because of Mayor De Blasio's roll-out of proposed changes to the exam that has angered certain constituencies including many Asian-American stakeholders. At the same time, the appalling figures of Latinx and Black student representation in the seven New York City specialized high schools that prompted De Blasio's proposed changes remains unresolved at the time of this writing.

This SHSAT debate is a surface manifestation of deeper inequalities. Racism affects different groups of people differently, and there is a diversity of opinions within all of our communities.²² But white supremacy wins when any of us are still oppressed, and the lack of equity in the admissions process must be addressed. I call on the city DOE and the state legislature to endorse Senator John Liu's work gathering diverse stakeholders to have critical conversations about the SHSAT and the Mayor's plan. Further, I support these and other conversations that could lead to alternative evaluation methods that will be acceptable to everyone. Diversifying the entrance process to specialized high schools must be an intermediate step to transitioning away from this flawed model of gifted education that I discuss at length below.



²² Touré, Madina. "Asian Americans argue they're not of one mind on specialized schools." *PoliticoPro*, 22 Aug. 2019.

School Climate: the Ecosystem of Public Education

Once we have established a just and equitable funding stream for public education and have designed transparent and accessible forms of governance and assessment, the work turns to what actually happens *inside* those schools. This is one of the most exciting parts, and I have taken great care to lay out a thorough vision of how I believe the ecosystem of public education can function if we pull together.

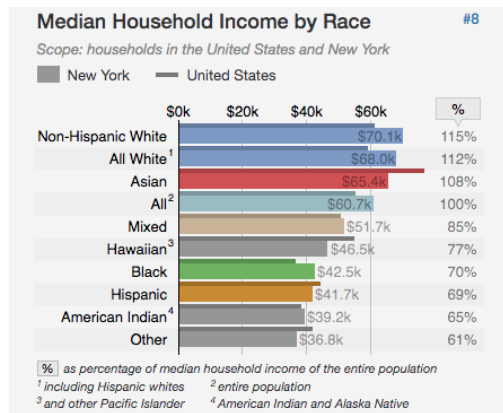
In this section, I discuss transformative ways of running a school focused not on discipline and punishment but on consequences and restorative justice. Next, I provide an overview of Community Schools as a model to embrace at the state level. The third section discusses certain learning approaches we need to incorporate to reach all types of learners, while the final section calls for curricular changes to ensure we provide a well-rounded education.

Ecosystems of Equity

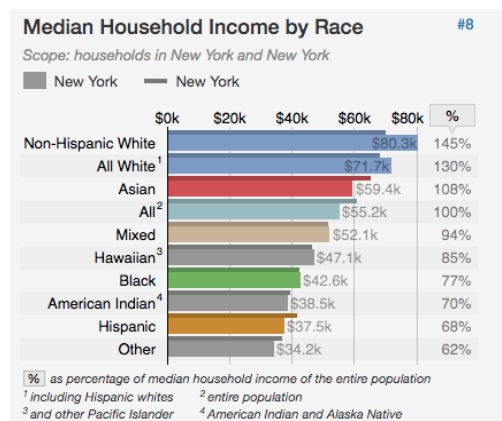
Systemic Racism and Over-Policing of Public Schools

In both New York City and New York State, economic disparities persist across racial categories:

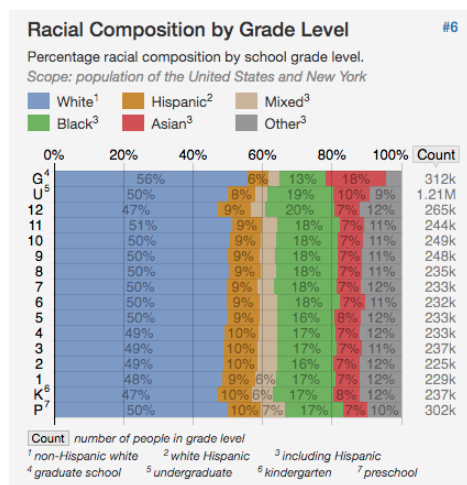
New York State²³



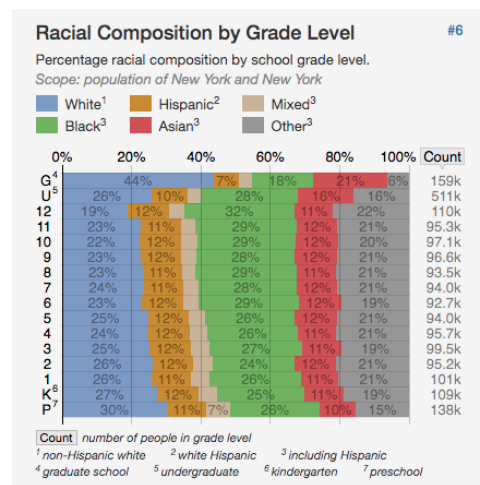
New York City



New York State



New York City



These disparities that link race to economic status represent a form of systemic racism that translates into educational racism, especially when compounded with the higher proportion of students of color in urban areas like New York City than in the state at large (see charts above).

²³ All graphs above come from *StatisticalAtlas.com* with data from 2010 U.S. Census and 2016 American Community Survey

Over 65 years after winning the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, New York State persistently ranks among the most inequitably funded and most segregated public education systems in the U.S.²⁴ We must consider fiscal equity a key issue of racial and economic justice and fully fund our public schools now. As mentioned above, the Foundation Aid formula aims to allocate more funding to school districts that have high rates of students in poverty, students with disabilities, and students participating in English Language Learning. Based on this current legal framework, the State of New York owes school districts over \$4 billion in Foundation Aid. A closer look at how this aid is supposed to be distributed reveals troubling trends of educational racism.

Over 65 years after winning the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, New York State persistently ranks among the most inequitably funded and most segregated public education systems in the U.S.

25 school districts in New York State are designated “high-need” thanks to the aforementioned criteria. According to advocacy group the Alliance for Quality Education, these districts represent 80% of New York State’s Black and Latinx students, and 69% of our students living in poverty. In 2019, these 25 districts are still owed 62% of all Foundation Aid—\$2.6 billion that communities like ours have yet to see.²⁵

Of the 25 “high-need” school districts recognized by New York State, only 69% of students in those districts’ ZIP codes graduate high school. This is staggeringly low compared to the 95% graduation rate of New York State’s wealthy ZIP codes. By telling Black and Latinx children to learn in underfunded schools, New York State is perpetuating educational racism in not offering equal access to educational resources and support. According to the Schott Foundation, among the markers of inequality that too often set schools in communities of color apart are health insurance rates, mental health, early childhood education, suspension and expulsion alternatives, economic integration, and experienced teachers.²⁶ These markers reinforce the connection between race and class and, in turn, between class and learning outcomes such that parental income is still the best predictor of student learning outcomes, with race a close second.

Current disciplinary policies and procedures unfairly target students of color, which ultimately feeds directly into the school-to-prison pipeline. AQE conducted a statewide study that revealed students of color are disproportionately targeted for suspensions, referrals to law enforcement, and juvenile detention. The numbers in Buffalo, Utica, Rochester, Albany, and New York City all tell the same story: school discipline is administered towards students of color, particularly black students, far more than on their white peers.²⁷ Current school disciplinary procedures have been disproportionately implemented not just against students of color, but also against students with disabilities and students who identify as LGBTQ+. These disciplinary procedures exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline.

New Approaches to “Discipline”

Senator Velmanette Montgomery has introduced legislation ([S767A](#)) to combat this issue. Rather than using suspensions as a first resort for infractions and violations, public and charter schools would be required to adopt a discipline code setting forth the policies and procedures for disciplinary measures. In other words, suspensions would be a last resort. The discipline code would include a range of age-appropriate and graduated disciplinary measures designed to impose the least harmful and most appropriate response. Further, students would be afforded due process when suspensions would be imposed. Before suspending a student, schools would be required to notify the student and their parents or guardians of a hearing to address the student’s conduct and whether a suspension is warranted. The school would be

²⁴ Kucsera, John and Gary Orfield. *New York State’s Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future* (2014). The Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁵ Marcou-O’Malley, Marina. “Educational Racism: Andrew Cuomo’s Record of Underfunding Public Schools in Black & Latino Communities.” (2018.) Alliance for Quality Education.

²⁶ The Schott Foundation. *The Loving Cities Index: Creating Loving Systems Across Communities to Provide All Students an Opportunity to Learn*. (Feb. 2018).

²⁷ Alliance for Quality Education & Public Policy and Education Fund of New York. “Systemic Racism & New York State’s School To Prison Pipeline.” (2019).

required to produce evidence warranting a suspension, and the student would be given the opportunity to challenge the school's evidence by introducing evidence and witness testimony. Additionally, the student would have the right to be represented by an attorney or by an advocate at the hearing. I support this bill as a first step toward disciplinary reform we so badly need in New York State public schools.

Restorative Justice

More and more stakeholders in public education are coming to understand the damage that the carceral mentality has done to generations of students, particularly students of color. I join these advocates in their call for a shift away from a framework of punishment or discipline and toward one of consequences. Most promising is the adaptation of restorative justice practices in school environments over the past decade to great success.

I join these advocates in their call for a shift away from a framework of punishment or discipline and toward one of consequences.

Restorative justice practices come from indigenous concepts of what we call “justice.” These indigenous approaches to justice are proactive in that people seek to establish communities where wrongdoing is less likely to occur. They prioritize the interconnectedness of all things and the healing of broken or damaged relationships when harm is done. They center the multiple truths of experiences rather than the quest to discover one objective truth about events that occurred. They vest the community with the authority to determine consequences rather than a stranger—like a judge—who hands down punishment. Finally, they acknowledge change over constancy and refuse to “freeze” people in the moment of an event as victims or perpetrators.

In recent decades, restorative justice practices have been adapted for use in faith communities, the prison abolition movement, and alternative dispute resolution, as well as education. Educational settings are typically structured around a disciplinary model that puts punishment at the fore, with teachers and administrators in positions of unimpeachable authority over students. Restorative justice approaches in an educational context use several tools to get stakeholders to rethink that structure. Restorative circles provide opportunities for people involved in an event to speak openly and honestly about their feelings around what happened and why it happened that way. These circles often lead to a discussion of how to heal the community, including consequences for the people who brought harm. These circles take tremendous resources of time and energy, but they build trust among the community and develop social-emotional skills in all participants. Other manifestations of restorative justice in educational contexts include peer courts and student mediation programs where peers learn how to guide restorative practices themselves. In schools that have committed to restorative justice, suspension rates have plummeted and school culture is healthier.²⁸ These gains are especially significant for working-class communities of color where students have for too long been over-disciplined by suspensions and criminalized in ways that perpetuate cycles of oppression.

In 2015, the New York City DOE committed to offering training in restorative practices to teachers, administrators, and other staff who requested it. In June 2019, the DOE announced they are contracting with National University System's Sanford Harmony program to provide all elementary schools with access to a social-emotional learning curriculum, as well as building restorative justice practices into all middle and high schools.²⁹ This is an important step. Restorative justice practices are already a state-supported evidence-based strategy for NYSED.³⁰ Unfortunately, the efficacy of restorative justice practices drops off sharply when schools do not commit to a complete overhaul of their culture. For this reason, I support setting aside grant-based funding for district- and school-wide adoptions of restorative practices that can be distributed through a request for proposals (RFP) process.

²⁸ See, recently, Vol. 36 No. 2-3 of *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* for an extended colloquy on the efficacy of Restorative Justice practices.

²⁹ Office of the Mayor of New York City. “[Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, Chancellor Carranza Announce Major Expansion of Social-Emotional Learning and Restorative Justice Across All City Schools.](#)” 20 June 2019.

³⁰ For a complete list of state-supported evidence-based strategies, see <http://www.nysed.gov/accountability/state-supported-evidence-based-strategies>.

Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) often goes hand-in-hand with restorative practices. SEL is an evidence-based approach to teaching that, according to national leaders at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, is “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”³¹ Like restorative practices, SEL is most effective when it becomes infused in the culture of a school so that it informs every interaction students have. SEL is a broader umbrella that obviates the need for individual programs like anti-bullying campaigns and social media awareness and literacy. In other words, if students are consistently learning self-awareness and -management along with relationship skills and responsible decision-making, there will be much less need for one-off, reactive campaigns to try to curb bullying outbreaks or online abuse. Thus, SEL should be used for prevention, intervention, and restoration so as to balance the emotional well-being of students. SEL also plugs into restorative practices because the latter are sites where SEL can be honed, especially in the development of coping and conflict resolution skills. These skills in turn can help avert many of the non-clinical mental health crises students face in adolescence.

Like restorative practices, SEL is most effective when it becomes infused in the culture of a school so that it informs every interaction students have.

School administrators recognize the importance of these approaches, and we must support them through policy that makes it easier for them to train staff in SEL pedagogy.³² New York City has already placed a priority on these efforts, but we can do more. In order to facilitate the wider adoption of SEL in classrooms across New York State, I call on the Board of Regents to develop student learning standards for SEL that can be incorporated into teacher training programs (ibid. 9). We also must earmark funding within professional development monies that the State provides for SEL programming.

Equitable Admissions and School Integration

I support equitable admissions practices that do not perpetuate discrimination based on demonstrated metrics, which often cover for underlying discrimination based on race and class. Admissions based on grades, test scores, behavior, and attendance, for instance, are exclusionary. Inclusionary admissions instead focus on integrating schools through admissions practices. Students should apply to schools based on their interests and the areas of enrichment a particular school offers, not because one school has higher test scores or better college placement records than another. In turn, schools should select students based on their interest profile and their fit within the existing school community, not because of their behavioral records or grades. I call on the DOE to adopt the recommendations of the SDAG by phasing out the use of exclusionary admissions and instituting district-wide inclusionary practices. These practices will integrate schools across race and class while creating schools where students feel supported in their interests.

I call on the DOE to adopt the recommendations of the SDAG by phasing out the use of exclusionary admissions and instituting district-wide inclusionary practices.

Community Schools: Schools in and of the Community

Community schools are a diffuse but evidence-based model of transformative change for struggling public schools, one that has emerged in several U.S. urban areas over the past two decades. In fact, the very first community school in New York City opened in District 6 while I was the school board president in the early 1990s with the tireless work of Children’s Aid Society. In this model, the school becomes a community hub that serves an expanded set of stakeholders to include students’ families and the surrounding environs. The four most common pillars of the community schools model identified by a meta-study that

³¹ See the excellent resources CASEL offers at <https://casel.org/>.

³² See DiPaoli, Jennifer L., Matthew Atwell, and John Bridgeland. “A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools.” (2017). Civic Enterprises, the Hart Research Associates, and CASEL.

the Learning Policy Institute conducted in 2017 are: integrated student supports for health and home-life circumstances, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. These approaches are tried and true on their own, but they work more effectively to reduce absenteeism and suspension rates and increase the quality of student learning outcomes when all four areas work in concert with one another.

Underpinning these interventions are the same principles that guide my broader vision of public education here. First is the idea that we must devote more time and resources to the schools where opportunity gaps persist because that increase in resources is the only way these schools can succeed in educating the whole student for all students. This is a fundamental statement of equity. Second, the principle of transparency: we must align community-based organizations with public education in a way that makes services transparent and accessible to students and their families who are otherwise discouraged by the difficulty of navigating a dense web of service providers to get what they need. Third is the notion that these schools are public, and in housing resources there for students and their families, those resources also become public.

The sections below all plug into the structure that community schools lay out, which has taken hold in New York City since Mayor DeBlasio's initiative began in 2014. There are now over 230 community schools in the Department of Education purview, with more coming online each year. The State program has lagged behind in part due to past Republican control of the Senate.

I am supportive of Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins' bill [S5561](#), carried by Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, that would set aside \$250 million for the development of community schools throughout New York State as a prime vehicle to advance many of the policies below. I would like to see more rigorous requirements for programming in the applications for community schools in light of the evidence base that the interventions of the community school model are collectively more effective when more of them are adopted.



School Based Health Clinics

School based health clinics (SBHCs) are medical health centers located within schools to provide immediate health services for students, including primary care, reproductive health, mental health and crisis management, dental services, and more. SBHCs help families avoid emergency room visits, aid parents in healthcare for sick children, and lower school absences. Services are free for students attending schools that offer an SBHC, regardless of their background. There are about 260 SBHCs in New York State, 63% of them in New York City. More than 250,000 children are enrolled in these clinics overseen by the NYS Department of Health. These clinics receive funding from various sources such as local, state, and federal grants, Medicaid and private insurance reimbursements, and foundation grants.³³

Food and Nutrition

School lunches are the one guaranteed meal of the day for 400,000 students in New York State. They are an integral part of many children's lives and should be taken as seriously as the classroom environment on which many education advocates tend to focus. Several policy initiatives exist for school meals, and my office is introducing additional ones for the coming legislative session.

³³ For a nationwide view of SBHCs, see Heller, Emily. "Improving Access to Care with School-Based Health Centers." (2017). National Conference of State Legislatures.

Religious observance should not prevent a student from being able to eat food provided at school. That is why I support Senator Comrie's bill [S2446](#) that would require New York City schools to offer a diversity of foods to meet the needs of students who observe diets including Halal or Kosher. I also support Senator Hoylman's bill [S1472](#) to require plant-based food options at school meals statewide. Because so many students in New York City come from food-insecure families, I am intrigued by Senator Parker's bill [S6068](#) to pilot a program to send kids home on the weekends with frozen meals made of unopened and unused ingredients in school cafeterias in one school within each borough. Other cities in New York with high food-insecure populations should also be included in this pilot.

So much more can be done with school food and nutrition in New York State given the need of many working-class urban and rural schools and the wealth of agricultural resources our state possesses. First, we must implement universal school lunch. No student should have to pay for lunch, let alone be shamed for the inability to do so. Free school lunch has been shown to increase consumption rates by 10-20% across all grades, which means more students eating in the middle of the day to fuel their learning in the afternoon of the day.³⁴ We must fund this program, to the tune of only \$2.3 million a year.

The agricultural richness of New York State begs closer collaboration between farmers and schools. The Farm-to-School program has reached roughly 60% of school districts, but only about 750,000 of the 2.6 million students in the state have access to it.³⁵ More integration between urban school districts and rural agricultural regions would help both schools and farms by providing fresh, more nutrient-rich foods to students while opening new markets to hard-working farmers. I support the creation of a joint task force of legislators from urban and those from rural agricultural regions work with school food providers and farmers to develop legislation that would provide fresh foods in *all* New York State public schools while supporting our local agriculture.

No student should have to pay for lunch, let alone be shamed for the inability to do so.

Homelessness

Children experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness face significant logistical and mental-emotional barriers to learning. Housing justice is thus a key issue for public education. During the 2017–18 school year, approximately 153,000 students statewide were identified as homeless, roughly 5,000 more than the previous school year.³⁶ 114,600 of those students were in New York City, with 38,000 of those in-shelter.³⁷ During the 2015-2016 school year, 12% of students experiencing homelessness passed the state math exam and 15% passed the state English exam.³⁸ Additionally, students experiencing housing insecurity are often late or absent from school because of the challenges of getting there. Some students, in fact, travel two or more boroughs to get to their school from their shelter. Generally, students living in shelters miss an average of about 30 school days in the school year. Additionally, the continuous stress of housing instability can seriously harm the mental health of students. Approximately 46% of homeless students reported struggling with depression, 35% of homeless students reported being bullied, and homeless students were four times more likely to commit suicide.³⁹

The New York City DOE has recently allocated an additional \$12 million—bringing the total investment to \$28 million—for services geared towards aiding students experiencing homelessness. The additional \$12 million will go towards hiring approximately 100 school-based community coordinators to provide

34 See Community Food Advocates' 2017 factsheet "[Universal Free School Lunch Has a Significant Positive Impact on Students of All Grade Levels](#)" and New York School Nutrition Association's 2019 budget ask "[Eliminate the Student Contribution for Reduced-Price Meals](#)."

35 The [USDA Farm-to-School census](#) keeps track of these data for each state, further broken down by district.

36 Touré, Madina. "Data show more than 114K New York City students are homeless." *Politico New York*, 15 Oct. 2018.

37 Chapman, Ben. "NYC homeless students stiffed by Mayor de Blasio's budget." *New York Daily News*, 8 Mar. 2019.

38 Shapiro, Eliza. "[Homelessness in New York Public Schools Is at a Record High: 114,659 Students](#)." *The New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2018.

39 Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. "Suicide and Depression Among Homeless High School Students." Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 26 Jul. 2018.

support for homeless students; allow for 12 students in temporary housing (STH) content experts to serve as borough-based regional managers who will oversee school-based and shelter-based support services and lead a team of 15–20 staff members; provide professional development for STH coordinators, shelter-based family assistants and school-based staff to focus on trauma-informed practices, data-driven decision making, and resource coordination for homeless students.⁴⁰ These funds also build upon the existing “Bridging the Gap” program that includes 69 social workers at 43 elementary schools with high homeless student populations; double the number of afterschool reading clubs that provide reading programs and homework help three days a week to students in grades K-5 at homeless shelters; and support school admissions in shelters and school-based health services at schools with high homeless student populations.

From a legislative perspective, the new rent laws provide tenants with greater housing stability and security that should reduce the number of families who experience homelessness. Through a host of new protections—ending preferential rents, limiting major capital improvements and individual apartment improvements, ending vacancy bonuses, and putting a stop to deregulation of apartments—tenants will be less susceptible to market forces and hostile practices by unscrupulous landlords designed to evict or have tenants move out in order to obtain market rates. Furthermore, these new rent laws do not expire, making these protections permanent. The permanency of these protections also provides greater stability for tenants that they will be able to stay in their homes.

While the passage of new rent protections was a monumental achievement, there is still more we can do legislatively to provide support for individuals and families with less stable living conditions. We need to pass [S2375/A1620](#), carried by Senator Liz Krueger and Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi, that would create home stability support (HSS) supplement programs. HSS programs provide an extra layer of support to families that are on the brink of homelessness by providing rental and heating assistance. This legislation would strengthen HSS programs to fund a rent supplement of the current shelter allowance plus 85% of the gap between the shelter allowance and the fair market rent as determined by HUD. Furthermore, localities would have the option to increase this rent supplement up to 100% of the fair market rent at the locality’s expense. This legislation would also offer heating assistance, which has not increased in almost 30 years, for homes that do not include heat in the rent. For all these benefits, HSS legislation would actually save taxpayers money because the program itself costs less than sheltering families who experience homelessness, amounting to a savings of roughly \$16,060 annually per person at risk of homelessness, for a total estimated savings of over \$250 million in New York City alone.⁴¹

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Mental Health

Suicide and self-harm are a major health crisis for our youth in New York. Between 2007 and 2015, the number of children and teenagers treated for suicide and attempted suicide doubled from 580,000 to 1.12 million.⁴² Further, in 2016, 4,278 New York teenagers under 19 years of age visited emergency rooms for self-harm and 1,565 teenagers under 19 years of age were hospitalized for self-harm.⁴³ We have an obligation to provide our youth with the care they need and it is equally important that we destigmatize mental health issues. To further this goal, I have introduced a bill, [S4217](#), that would mandate at least one clinical licensed social worker and one psychologist in every school in New York State. These professionals will not just address the mental health crises of our students; their mere presence will signal a shift in priori-

⁴⁰ New York City Department of Education. “[Chancellor Carranza Announces Additional Supports for Students in Temporary Housing](#).” 1 Nov. 2018; updated 2 May 2019.

⁴¹ See the slides on Home Stability Support at <https://www.homestabilitysupport.com/about-the-plan>.

⁴² Burstein, Brett. “[Estimates of Emergency Department Visits for Suicide Attempts, Thoughts Among Kids, Teens](#).” *JAMA Pediatrics*, 8 Apr. 2019.

⁴³ These data come from the [New York State Suicide and Self-Harm Dashboard](#), a collaboration among New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Bureau of Health Care Analytics, Vital Statistics Program, and Bureau of Occupational Health & Injury Prevention.

ties toward the mental and emotional wellness of the school community, which furthers other goals in this policy vision like prioritizing social-emotional learning and restorative justice. In addition, Senator Hoylman introduced legislation to allow students to have an excused absence from school for mental health issues (S6687). I am a proud co-sponsor of this bill because it will help remove the stigma from mental illness and remove barriers to care for our young people.

Extracurriculars

An important part of the Community Schools model is providing strong extracurricular activities to complement an extended school day and summer offerings. In New York City in particular, these extracurriculars must be strengthened by fully funding the Public School Athletic League, or PSAL, so that all schools, including middle and high schools, can participate in sports. Team sports are especially important for social development and all athletic activities for school-age children are shown to improve overall health and correlate with higher graduation rates.⁴⁴

Learning Differently

Differentiated Learning Environments

In New York City, education advocates are calling into question the practice of testing young children for entry into so-called “Gifted and Talented” programs (G&T) that include citywide schools, district-based programs, and school-based “rigid tracking” that separates students based on perceived academic ability. I do not believe this system is the best way to ensure diverse learning environments that serve the needs of all students.

Instead of focusing on the flaws in the current model, which the School Diversity Action Group (SDAG) has laid out clearly in their report, I want to focus on solutions here.⁴⁵ Small classes would be especially useful to help teachers reach students of different abilities.⁴⁶ I support training programs that develop teachers who can teach to multiple levels of learners within the same classroom, offering content to build on the weaknesses of students in given area while also offering challenges in the areas where students have strengths. Keeping these learners in the same classrooms and in the same schools is proven to keep schools and districts more diverse while meeting the needs of all students. Comprehensive professional development should be funded by the state legislature so that all teachers can learn the basics of differentiated learning environments.

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We also need to create a legislative task force to investigate the way teaching colleges are preparing teachers to work in urban settings and to offer differentiated classrooms. In particular, we need to look into the 44 See, for instance, Eime, Rochelle M., et al. “A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport.” *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition*

and Physical Activity, 10 (2013).

⁴⁵ School Diversity Action Group. “Making the Grade II: New Programs for Better Schools.” (August 2019).

⁴⁶ See Shino Tanakawa and Leonie Haimson’s OpEd from May 2019, “Lower class size and school integration go hand in hand.”

creation of dual certification processes in special education and language-based learning differences as a way to fight the growing literacy crisis.

Children with Special Needs

Obtaining special education services for your child is often difficult, painful, and emotionally draining. Earlier this year, New York State decided to cut funding from centers tasked with assisting parents through this confusing process.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, it is often the savvy and persistent parents who acquire the right services for their children, which places children of parents with limited time, formal education, and English language skills at a disadvantage.

An equitable and inclusive public education system means ensuring students of all abilities have access to a sound basic education. For over a decade, New York State has had a dismal record of fully complying with students' federally protected rights. In New York City particularly, advocates and parents have been waging campaigns asking for the department to overhaul its practices.⁴⁸ Blame is not limited to public schools. Charter schools have been guilty of violating civil rights when it comes to students with special needs.⁴⁹

Having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should not translate into an academic death sentence. Students with IEPs are among the students most likely to drop out of school and the least likely to graduate with a high school diploma. As mentioned above, students with special needs are also more likely to be suspended than their peers. With our aging infrastructure, most of the schools in New York State are not accessible to students with mobility impairments. Many schools in New York City are overcrowded and without sufficient facilities dedicated to offering therapeutic services. Not all schools are even equipped with personnel to support students with special needs. The reasons are numerous: not enough teachers with special education certification, not enough students with specific special needs to trigger the hiring of a specific teacher, not enough certified related service providers, or not enough administrative support to meet those needs.

To alleviate these problems, New York City recently approved additional funding to hire school psychologists and social workers to address turn around rate of evaluations and service complaints. I have several additional policy recommendations. First, there need to be multiple pathways to graduation so that students with IEPs can demonstrate their knowledge in more ways than by passing a test.⁵⁰ The shift away from a disciplinary model toward a model of restorative justice will help ensure that students with special needs spend more time in class and less time suspended. As far as infrastructure is concerned, we need a massive capital infusion to retrofit all existing school buildings to comply with the latest accessibility standards.⁵¹ Additionally, schools serving students with IEPs requiring assistive technologies should have those technologies provided by the State at no extra cost to the school. Finally, we need to emphasize *integrated* classrooms, which follows on my thoughts about differentiated learning environments above. We need to provide baseline special education training to general education teachers so that these students can still learn without having to wait for approval to attend a restrictive environments. In other words, teachers should be trained to reach all types of learners regardless of whether they choose to focus on earning a special education certification or not.

There need to be multiple pathways to graduation so that students with IEPs can demonstrate their knowledge in more ways than by passing a test.

47 Zimmerman, Alex. "A 'gut punch': Parents decry New York's plan to upend special ed help centers and reduce staff." *Chalkbeat*, 11 Jan. 2019.

48 Karlin, Rick. "New York remains on federal list for special education problems: Albany, Schenectady schools have been cited for years!" *Albany Times Union*, 11 Mar. 2019.

49 Veiga, Christina. "State faults Success Academy, NYC education department for violating civil rights of students with disabilities." *Chalkbeat*, 27 Feb. 2019.

50 Handler, Samantha. "As New York Rethinks High School Graduation Requirements, Under-the-Radar School Group May Offer a Model." *Gotham Gazette*. 23 Sep. 2019.

51 Advocates for Children of New York. "Access Denied: School Accessibility in New York City." October, 2018.

Dyslexia

Thousands of children across our state come to school with unique challenges to their ability to learn. Through the years of our struggle to improve public schools for all our kids, it has become clear that dyslexia is an issue that we have to address to level the playing field. Teaching children to read is the most fundamental and consequential job of our schools. Moreover, nearly all struggling readers will learn to read with the same system that benefits dyslexic students: structured literacy.⁵²

According to the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, dyslexia affects 20% of the population and represents 80 to 90% of all those with learning disabilities. It is the most common of all neuro-cognitive disorders and probably the most misunderstood.

One of the hardest parts for the students, their parents, and educators is that dyslexia affects the ability to speak, read, and spell, even though these students may be highly intelligent. While people with dyslexia are slow readers, they are often fast and creative thinkers. All dyslexic students, if taught to read, are able to contribute to society. However, there are too many children affected by dyslexia who, by no fault of their own, do not have a chance to succeed academically. They work twice as hard as their peers who read more naturally, but accomplish only half as much. Their frustration mounts and it affects all parts of their lives.

We must also deal with the intersection of socio-economics and race with dyslexia. While all students regardless of background can be affected by dyslexia, the number of white students who are identified early and referred to the correct support services or educational setting is disproportionately higher than the number of black or brown students. This is due to limited access to costly neuropsychiatric evaluations, smaller class sizes in more affluent schools, and wealthier parents' greater time and resources to navigate a complex system to obtain services, a system that often requires legal representation. Meanwhile, the majority of students who go without appropriate support services, often asked to repeat the grade, are from low income households. The earlier this issue is identified and students receive the right accommodations in their schools, the sooner these young people can make great progress in college and their careers.

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To address the unique problems that students with dyslexia face, I've advanced a bill co-sponsored with our ally Brooklyn Assemblyman Robert Carroll: [S5608](#) lays out new requirements for teaching students at risk for dyslexia or other related difficulties or differences, and it should be delivered during ELA classes so students do not miss content that is important to their education. It requires that schools inform parents of the intervention services their child is receiving. This gives parents more power and input to ensure their child is getting the education they need and deserve.

We also need to create a culture for dyslexia, where public school students with dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities will be provided with the opportunity to thrive and learn in their neighborhood schools. A partnership between local school districts and the City University of New York or State University of New York can create a cadre of highly trained teachers that can be the beginning of a game changer in a system that has often left too many of our children behind. We must also provide access to affordable neuropsychological evaluations for families who need it.

We must also provide access to affordable neuropsychological evaluations for families who need it.

⁵² See, for instance, the [structured reading primer](#) at the International Dyslexia Association.

Multilingual Learners

Statewide, large disparities persist between the graduation rates of Multilingual learners and English-proficient students. This gap is a manifestation of educational racism. Our education system must serve all students, including those who are learning English as an additional language to their native tongue. The bill I introduced in the Senate to combat this disparity, [S4031](#), passed in both houses and awaits Governor Cuomo's signature at the time of writing. It will create a commission for the educational advancement of these multilingual learners in New York State. Once this commission produces an initial report, I look forward to enacting legislation to benefit this vulnerable population so our education system can stop perpetuating discrimination and instead recognize and value the skills these students bring to the table.

Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Learners

My language equality and acquisition for deaf children (LEAD-K) bill [S4410](#) proposes that deaf students be provided with developmental milestones that will help to determine their progress. The Department of Education, along with New York State schools, use several tools to assess students on their understanding and development. These tools should include all students and include infants, toddlers, and preschool children for all subject matters. It is also important that the committee responsible for creating these assessments have experience with deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals or themselves have a hearing impairment. These developmental milestones for deaf or hard-of-hearing children are already offered in Kansas, Oregon, Georgia, Hawaii, South Dakota, and Louisiana. New York students need these resources. This bill protects students from being overlooked on regents exams, grade promotions and additional assistance opportunities. All students have a right to equal education opportunities and this bill reflects that right.

Classrooms for All

All students deserve classroom settings that support them to grow and develop wherever they are in their learning journey.

Early Childhood Education

One of the most widely agreed-upon issues in education research is the importance of early childhood education. Parents must be engaged in their children's education for those children to be successful in achieving goals of life generally. Within a school setting, there are debates about the balance of play-based learning with instructional learning. Educators must follow these debates as they play out in the literature, but I support research that confirms the developmental potential that play-based learning unlocks and reinforces the dangers of test-oriented education for young children. One issue all scholars and advocates agree on is the priority of getting children in schools for Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten, and even so-called 3-K. Part of the barrier to entry in New York State has been the cost of transportation for such programs, especially in rural areas where districts incur additional expenses their funding cannot cover. That is why I proposed bill [S4409](#), which says that school districts that provide transportation for Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs must be funded to do so. We should not allow any obstacles to stand in our way of providing universal access to Pre-K for all children of New York State.

Class size

Within New York City, classes are consistently larger than the benchmarks set in the Contracts for Excellence program described above for all grades, and they remain far above the average in the rest of the state and country. We cannot provide real equity to NYC children with class sizes this large. In fact, class sizes have risen sharply, especially in the early grades, since the state's highest court in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case concluded they were too large to provide NYC children with their constitutional right to a sound basic education. Exhaustive evidence-based studies have shown that smaller class size increases student learning outcomes across the board, but especially among disadvantaged children and students of color, who reap twice the benefit from small classes—which is why it is so effective at narrowing the opportunity gap. The only way we reduce class size is by hiring more classroom teachers and ensuring schools have the space to form separate classes. Two main mechanisms for doing so are increasing funding and spending existing funding more efficiently, both of which class size advocates across New York State have been fighting for. I support these advocates' work. While increasing state aid for schools, we have to put emphasis on ensuring that the funds are spent appropriately—and focused on lowering

class size, especially in the early grades and in struggling schools. I also call for a state-led overhaul of the ways the School Construction Authority counts classroom space. The flawed methods and reliance on class sizes for 4th grade and above that do not comply with the Contracts for Excellence (C4E) law I described above have led to a false sense of empty space when, in fact, many districts are dangerously overcrowded.

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Culturally Responsive Education

Culturally responsive education is an evidence-based method of teaching that treats the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds as a resource for them to use in acquiring knowledge and skills.⁵³ New York City schools are some of the most diverse schools in the country, with nearly 180 languages spoken in our schools. Studies have shown that white school staff have lower expectations of students of color, are more likely to suspend students of color than white students for the same behaviors,⁵⁴ have insufficient options for books by and about people of color⁵⁵, and want to talk about race in the classroom but are ill-equipped to do so.⁵⁶

Our cultural diversity is one of our society's greatest strengths. Not only is it important to learn about our cultural diversity, but it is important to teach about our cultural diversity in ways that accurately and properly reflect that diversity. That is why I am a proud cosponsor of legislation that Senator Zellnor Myrie has introduced to create culturally responsive education curricula and standards. Through this legislation, schools will have curriculum standards for: African American history and achievement, Native American history and achievement, Latino American history and achievement, Asian American history and achievement, and the role of racial oppression and inequity in the formation, growth, and existence of our country and state (S2937).

One way I have supported culturally responsive education during my time as Senator is by sponsoring a bill to move the Amistad Commission from the New York Department of State to the State Education Department (NYSED), S6445. This commission is charged with developing curricular materials on the African slave trade to integrate into K–12 education in New York State, but it has not been able to effectively carry out this mission under its current administrative home. It is my hope that by moving it to NYSED and making new appointments, we can jump-start this important work. We must incorporate the rich archive of primary sources, journalistic and historical studies, and artistic representations of slavery and its legacy into our curricula in ways that inform our children and, in particular, offer routes to self-understanding for Afro-diasporic students.

Another form of culturally-responsive education should be the inclusion of LGBTQ history and lifeways in the state curricula for our public schools. I am introducing legislation to require middle and high school curricula to include such materials so that our children come to understand and appreciate the contributions LGBTQ individuals and communities have made and so that our students who identify as LGBTQ feel their identities represented and affirmed in their learning environment.

Teaching Financial Literacy

Too many students in New York State leave school without an understanding of how to manage personal finances. This gap leaves them open to exploitation as adults by pay-day lenders and other scams. It

53 Culturally Responsive Education is not yet an evidence-based state-supported strategy according to NYSED. For another state's take on it, see Connecticut State Board of Education that endorsed the approach in 2011.

54 Goff, Phillip Atiba, et al. "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, No. 4 (2014): 526–545.

55 The Cooperative Children's Book Center at the School of Education at University of Wisconsin-Madison keeps track of representation in children's books at <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>. Their statistics illuminate the need for the kind of diverse representations encouraged by culturally responsive education.

56 While I have encountered much anecdotal evidence to support this claim, scholars like H. Richard Milner have actually researched this discomfort. See Dr. Milner's research summarized in: Anderson, Melinda D. "How Teachers Learn to Discuss Racism." *The Atlantic*, 9 Jan. 2017.

also makes it harder for young adults to make smart choices about their finances if they have never been taught how to manage their money. Mandating financial literacy courses for students in grades 6–8 is an easy way to ensure a baseline of knowledge among our public school students. I introduced S4077, co-sponsored in the Assembly by Diana Richardson, to require school districts to implement curricula around financial literacy. I also plan to amend this bill to include a component of financial self-advocacy on top of basic literacy. Our students must learn early how to advocate for themselves in the workplace, how to understand benefits and pensions, and how to avoid the financial underworld of predatory lending and high-interest credit cards.

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Arts Education

Teaching our students skills for creative self-expression dovetails with many of the policy positions I have taken above. The arts can be important components of social-emotional learning. The arts can provide a key component of inclusive admissions processes where schools focus on a particular art form to attract certain students interested in deepening their practices. The arts can also reach different types of learners and become a path for them to better grasp other subjects like math or English.

And yet, despite all these benefits the arts are known to bring for our students, New York State has a mandate for arts education that has not been fully funded in large school districts like New York City.⁵⁷ I call on the Board of Regents and other policy makers to treat the arts as a core subject, and for my fellow legislators and the governor to fully fund our public education system so that we can provide arts education to all students in New York State.



Civic Education

I have long been passionate about civic education. Whenever I speak publicly, I try to offer a brief overview of how the state legislature works because I know how many people never learn these things in school. Civic participation is the cornerstone of our democracy, so we must redouble our efforts to educate young people in the function and roles of government, ways they can participate in decision-making at all levels, and media literacy, especially in the digital age. I am grateful that the Board of Regents has placed a priority on developing civic engagement in our classrooms since summer 2018.⁵⁸ NYSED's decision to include a Civic Readiness Initiative in their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan is also heartening.⁵⁹

But recent research by The Center for Educational Equity suggests that the lack of civic readiness in our public schools is more troubling than it seems at first glance.⁶⁰ Indeed, their survey of six schools points to grave disparities between well-resourced schools in high-wealth and majority-white districts and those less resourced schools in working-class and majority-people of color districts. All teachers whom scholars Jessica Wolff and Joe Rogers interviewed indicated an understanding of the importance of civic education, but many of the teachers in schools with high concentrations of poverty and of non-white students did not have the resources or the support to offer robust civics education, meaning that these students are less prepared to engage in our political process and critically approach media than their peers.⁶¹ This

57 See NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer's 2014 report on the topic: New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer. "State of the Arts: A Plan to Boost Arts Education in New York City Schools." (2014).

58 See, in particular, Chancellor Betty Rosa's June 2018 statement on the MetroCenter blog of New York University's Steinhardt School: <https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/site/metroblog/2018/06/05/454/>

59 NYSED discusses its commitment to civic readiness here: <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/civic-readiness-initiative>

60 Wolff, Jessica R. and Joseph R. Rogers. "Resources and Readiness: Exploring Civic Education Access and Equity in Six New York High Schools." The Center for Educational Equity. (2019).

61 Incidentally, Michael Rebell has also recently filed suit on behalf of 14 students and their families against the govern-

is an issue of equity at its core, then, and we must address it as such. I call on the Board of Regents to further their commitment to civic learning by issuing regulations that streamline the recommendations by CEE into standards of learning for social studies and history so that NYSED can issue new curricular guidance and the legislature can devote funds their fulfillment.

Civic participation is the cornerstone of our democracy, so we must redouble our efforts to educate young people in the function and roles of government, ways they can participate in decision-making at all levels, and media literacy, especially in the digital age.

Conclusion

Public education is the cornerstone of our society. It informs where families live and build community. It is the playground in which all children learn to experiment with inherent biases and acceptance, engage with new concepts, collaborate with one another, challenge themselves, and prepare for tomorrow. All public schools have the potential to be so much more than they are now. It can also be a place where families connect, heal, shine and move forward.

My fight for funding for public education has always been based on the premise that each child is deserving of the best education regardless of family income, ZIP code, race, or gender. As a parent activist who started over three decades ago, I am all too aware of the crucial voices parents must have in shaping their children's education. We have to continue mobilizing and supporting parents to take their voices from the school auditorium to the halls of Albany, impacting change in education policies.

This document is not meant to be a blueprint, but rather a reflection of all we have done thus far, a gathering of good ideas in one place. I hope it will spark conversations that lead to new ideas and innovation as we work to deliver a quality education for every child in New York State. I also hope this vision for public education pushes those adept at voicing their own concerns to voice concerns for the many who have no voice, so that no child is left to languish abandoned in a failing system. Right now, there are too many systems in play forcing students and parents to compete for crumbs and participate in a game of winners and losers. I think we can all agree that no child should feel like they are expected to fail. Instead, let's support transformative change, policies that will bring transparency to the equitable distribution of resources in all of our public schools.

ment of Rhode Island for failing to provide basic civic education requirements in their K-12 curricula. See the suit here: <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5331442/Schoolsuit.pdf>.

