Testimony of:

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Oversight:  

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Good afternoon. My name is Grant Cowles and I am the Senior Policy and Advocacy Associate for Youth Justice at Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 74-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

I would like to thank City Council Education Committee Chair Dromm and the members of the City Council Education Committee for holding today’s hearing about bullying, harassment, and discrimination in NYC schools. I would also like to thank the City Council for introducing a series of bills to strengthen accountability, information access, and support to try to prevent, address and be transparent to parents, students and teachers about bullying, harassment, discrimination and ways to support LGBTQ students in schools. In addition, we are also pleased that this hearing is also addressing two important pieces of legislation aimed at ensuring children are receiving free summer meals.

This hearing to address prevention and responses to bullying in school is vitally important. Bullying, harassment, and discrimination directly and deeply hurt victims in emotional, mental, physical, academic, and social ways, and often with lifelong repercussions. Every New York City student deserves an educational environment where they can focus on their work and experience positive relationships. As we recently saw, failure to address bullying can lead to tragedy for all the youth involved.

While it is essential that schools be free from bullying, it is important to remember that harsh, punitive responses to all misbehavior, including bullying, lead to less safe environments and inflict more total harm than good. Bullying in all its ramifications is a complex social outcome that must be addressed holistically to create an environment that protects potential victims while teaching, supporting, and correcting students who engage in bullying in a way that does not push them out of school and take away their own opportunities for an education. Schools can, and must, be safe and supportive environments for all students, even students who make mistakes.

CCC commends the Administration and Department of Education for all of the efforts that have been undertaken to address bullying and create a positive school climate in NYC public schools. CCC applauds the school climate reforms that were introduced in 2015 as they explicitly recognize that the best method to create safe and welcoming environments in schools includes eliminating unnecessary suspensions, utilizing proven restorative practices that address school environments, and ensuring students returning to the classroom after temporary removals or suspensions are prepared to learn.1

As Mayor de Blasio stated in 2015 when he launched the school climate initiative:

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No parent should have to choose between a school that’s safe for their child and a school where every student is treated fairly. All our schools can and must be both. That’s why we are investing in the training and best practices needed to ensure that when problems arise, we fix them first and foremost inside our schools – not by sending a child home or calling 911 needlessly, hurting their education in the process. These changes will help make campuses safer, treat students of every background with dignity, and provide kids with the support they need to learn.2

CCC recognizes that addressing bullying is a challenge, but that it is nonetheless imperative. CCC believes that the initial policy changes the administration has taken to create a safe and supportive environment through holistic, restorative, and non-punitive measures is the research-based and best approach, and CCC recommends an even greater commitment to implementing and expanding these policies.

This testimony will provide a basic background of the research about addressing bullying and will then provide recommendations based upon the grounding principles of fostering a safe environment through meaningful accountability, supportive responses, and correcting misbehavior to create safe and welcoming attitudes, behaviors, and communities.

**Background Research and Statistics on Bullying**

- **Defining Bullying**

  The Center for Disease Control has defined “bullying” as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or groups of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social or educational harm.”3 This definition of bullying implicitly includes instances of virtual or cyber-bullying conducted through modes of communication that are not in-person (such as texts, social media, and other online platforms).

- **Data on Bullying in NYC schools**

  The New York State Dignity for All Students Act4 requires each school district, BOCES, and charter school to submit an annual report of material incidents of bullying, harassment, and/or discrimination that occur during the school year and that involve one or more bias categories (race, ethnic group, national origin, color, religion, religious

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2 “City Announces School Climate Reforms.”
practice, disability, gender, sexual orientation, sex, weight, and “other” for incidents not covered in other areas).\(^5\)

Despite this requirement, official reporting on instances of bullying in schools is very low. Seventy percent of New York City schools reported no instances of bullying in their schools.\(^6\) However, analyses have shown that schools and school personnel are not always reporting instances of bullying, making the official accounting unreliable and unrepresentative of the reality in many school buildings.\(^7\) The Attorney General noted in its 2016 investigation that there was “significant underreporting” in the state bullying data.\(^8\)

The annual survey of students and teachers conducted by the Department of Education show that bullying is a widespread issue and concern in NYC schools. In the 2016-2017 annual survey of students, 43% of the students who responded reported that students at their school harass, bully or intimidate other students some of the time or most of the time.\(^9\) In addition, 36% of teachers reported that students in their school harass, bully or intimidate students some of the time or most of the time. Despite the ongoing efforts to address harassment and bullying, it is clearly still an ongoing issue in City schools.

- National Research on Prevalence of Bullying

National research similarly shows that bullying continues to be a wide-spread occurrence. According to the Center for Disease Control, which collects national data through the Youth Risky Behavior Surveillance System, in 2015, 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in the preceding 12-month period.\(^10\) In addition, approximately 16% of the students reported being bullied electronically. Other


national reviews have similarly found bullying rates of between 1 in 4 students and 1 in 3 students.\textsuperscript{11}

Bullying is a social activity that often includes individuals beyond the main perpetrator and victim. Research has shown that bullying often involves groups of students who support each other in bullying other students.\textsuperscript{12}

Students who are perceived as different from their peers are often at highest risk of being bullied.\textsuperscript{13} National research has found that the rate for being victims of bullying among LGBTQ students is nearly double, ranging from 26\% to 44\%, while the rate for youth with disabilities is approximately 1.5 times as likely as youth without disabilities.\textsuperscript{14}

**Recommendations to Effectively Address Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying:**

1) **Efforts to Prevent Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Must Not be Overly Punitive**

There are many policies and practices that can help prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination in the first place, and then ensure schools can respond appropriately once it happens to rectify the situation and prevent further harm. These initiatives must be aimed toward creating a safe space for all students, and we strongly believe that these policies should not exclude or remove students from the school environment. It may seem tempting to respond to bullying by removing the perpetrators as punishment in an attempt to prevent future bullying, but this approach is not effective.

First, all students, even students who perpetrate bullying, need to be supported in school. The school’s mission to educate and support student development must not be ignored for certain students, even students who misbehave and who make poor decisions like participating in bullying or harassment. To be sure, victims deserve and need protections and support as they do not deserve to be bullied. But those who participate in bullying, harassment or discrimination also deserve attentive accountability that teaches them the attitudes and skills to enable them to be positively engaged in a school environment.

Second, no school can punish its way out of bullying or harassment. When looking at individual instances of bullying, they are most often done in group settings and done for social purposes, which implicates many students besides a single perpetrator. Overly-punitive and exclusionary policies (like removal from class or suspensions) as a response to all instances of bullying would mean draconian levels of punishment to a vast number of students. Moreover, punishment-as-deterrence only succeeds in moving the activity to some other place and time where there is a lesser likelihood of being caught, but it does not address the root cause and does not adequately


\textsuperscript{14} Preventing Bullying: through science, policy, and practice.
protect bullied students. Policing every act of bullying and harassment cannot be accomplished by school personnel and is not the primary function of educators, especially when much of the bullying is done out of view of school staff and through cyber-bullying methods.

Third, and most importantly, the research demonstrates that overly-punitive and zero-tolerance policies are ineffective at stopping misbehavior and bullying, and instead cause more harm.\footnote{Boccanfuso, Christopher and Megan Kuhfeld. \textit{Multiple Responses, Promising Results: evidence-based, nonpunitive alternatives to zero tolerance}. Child Trends, Research-to-Results Brief. March 2011. Available at \url{http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/alternatives-to-zero-tolerance.pdf}.} Harsh, punitive policies often cause the receiver of the punishment to disengage from school, resulting in manifold negative outcomes, such as failure to graduate and involvement with the justice system.\footnote{Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. Restorative Practices in Action Journal: for school and justice practitioners. Journal released at “Restorative Practices in Action: a conference for school and justice practitioners.” May 1, 2015. Available at \url{https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren/PDF/RestorativePracticeConf/RP_Journal.pdf}. See also Zimmer, Amy. “Here’s How to Reduce Bullying at Your Kid’s School.” \textit{DNA Info}. Oct. 6, 2017. Available at \url{https://www.dmainfo.com/new-york/20171006/west-farms/bullying-prevention-nyc-schools} (“‘This issue has continued to be a problem and people are seeing now that simplistic solutions such as increasing school security or instituting draconian punishments are not workable,’ Hamilton said. ‘There needs to be a more flexible dialogue to address the problems of both bullies and their victims.’”).}

Instead, schools can prevent and properly address bullying through policies that emphasize the dignity and value of every student. This requires a thorough commitment that all students deserve to be free from bullying and those students who do bully must be held accountable in a manner that supports their improved behavior without sacrificing their educational opportunities.\footnote{Restorative Practices in Action Journal: for school and justice practitioners. Journal released at “Restorative Practices in Action: a conference for school and justice practitioners.” May 1, 2015. Available at \url{https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren/PDF/RestorativePracticeConf/RP_Journal.pdf}. See also Zimmer, Amy. “Here’s How to Reduce Bullying at Your Kid’s School.” \textit{DNA Info}. Oct. 6, 2017. Available at \url{https://www.dmainfo.com/new-york/20171006/west-farms/bullying-prevention-nyc-schools} (“‘This issue has continued to be a problem and people are seeing now that simplistic solutions such as increasing school security or instituting draconian punishments are not workable,’ Hamilton said. ‘There needs to be a more flexible dialogue to address the problems of both bullies and their victims.’ ”).}

### 2) Use a Multi-pronged Approach that Applies Restorative and Preventive Practices

Single tactic strategies are less effective than policies that address the entire environment and influences of students.\footnote{Boccanfuso, Christopher and Megan Kuhfeld. \textit{Multiple Responses, Promising Results: evidence-based, nonpunitive alternatives to zero tolerance}. Child Trends, Research-to-Results Brief. March 2011. Available at \url{http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/alternatives-to-zero-tolerance.pdf}.} Multi-pronged, holistic approaches use multiple practices and strategies to address school climate and bullying. For example, a multi-pronged approach could utilize a written procedure for responding to instances of bullying, professional development for staff, a dedicated anti-bullying liaison for students to talk to about bullying, school-wide educational events and messaging, in-class facilitated discussions for students, and events with families to educate them on bullying prevention. Multi-pronged approaches are most effective when the
entire school community is involved, including students, families, administrators, teachers, and staff such as bus drivers, nurses, cafeteria and front office staff.\textsuperscript{19}

Restorative practices are very effective at responding to bullying as it both includes and addresses the larger community that often influences bullying, and it fosters empathy and respect among all parties which is lacking when bullying occurs.\textsuperscript{20} Restorative practices are a wide set of activities and policies that seek to prevent and respond to harm by restoring individuals through community-driven input and opportunities for listening and reconciliation by all parties.\textsuperscript{21} These practices also keep the responsible party included in the restoration process and able to maintain their place in the community, allowing them to not lose their academic progress or to not become disengaged from the entire educational environment.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition, universal prevention programs can establish an environment where bullying is unacceptable. Universal prevention programs can include strategies such as school climate initiatives and educational and awareness campaigns within schools. These programs generate consistent and thorough messaging that can create environments that remove social rewards for bullying and provides clear expectations and responses to instances of bullying.\textsuperscript{23} This includes using anti-bullying curriculum which teaches all kids that bullying or teasing is wrong. Adults (including teachers, school staff, and parents) need to be able to talk openly and often with students about bullying. When adults keep an ongoing dialogue about bullying, students are more willing to discuss their feelings about bullying and use adults as resources for their decision-making and behavior.\textsuperscript{24} The U.S. Department of Education recommends talking about bullying for 15 minutes a day, and provides tips and guidelines for how to talk with students about bullying, available at https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/index.html#Keep. School-wide pledges against bullying are another means to address the environment proactively, and when done appropriately, can be useful vehicles for establishing norms and personal investment against bullying.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{19} American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. \textit{Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations}. American Psychologist, 63(9), 852-862. 2008.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Restorative Practices in Action Journal: for school and justice practitioners}.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Preventing Bullying: through science, policy, and practice}. See also “Here’s How to Reduce Bullying at Your Kid’s School.”
Another tactic of addressing the environment to prevent bullying or harassment is to increase the use of structured physical activities, such as organized recess games and athletic challenges.26 Organized activities can help reduce bullying because they allow high levels of physical exertion, deflating pent-up energy and restlessness that can cause misbehavior and bullying in class or hallway settings. It also promotes cooperation, teamwork, rule-following, patience (while waiting for their turn), sharing, and respect, while actively filling the unstructured time when negative social dynamics, confrontations, or bullying often happens.

Victims of bullying can suffer mental anguish that can lead to mental health problems, including higher rates of depressions, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, lower academic achievement, feelings of loneliness, and wanting to avoid school.27 Likewise, the responsible parties who bully often have unaddressed mental health needs.28 Students who bully have higher rates of delinquent behavior, disliking school, suicidal thoughts, suicidal attempts, substance abuse, and violent thoughts.29 Increasing access to mental health services, especially on-site school-based mental health clinics, can help support students and address the causes and effects of bullying.30

Finally, classroom management techniques that prevent bullying and firmly address instances of bullying when they occur can be highly successful. One study showed that in-classroom techniques to prevent bullying was considered by students to be the most helpful strategy to address bullying compared to all other techniques.31

3) Support for Students who are Bullied is Critical

Schools must support students who are bullied in a thorough and holistic manner. It is essential that every student has at least one adult in the school building that they feel comfortable enough to talk about bullying. According to 2011 research by Dr. Ttofi and Dr. Farrington, only about 20 to 30% of students who are bullied notify adults about the bullying.32 When students have a meaningful relationship with an adult in school, they are more likely to reveal instances of bullying (either instances they experienced or they witnessed), which can allow the adult staff to

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27 Stopbullying.gov (website). “Understanding the Roles of Mental Health Professionals in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts.” Available at https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/hrsa_guide_mental-health-professionals_508.pdf. (Citing Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schoenfeld, & Gould, 2008; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010.)
28 “Here’s How to Reduce Bullying at Your Kid’s School.”
29 “Understanding the Roles of Mental Health Professionals in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts.” (Citing Cook et al., 2010; Klomek et al., 2008; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001.)
30 Id.
appropriately respond.\textsuperscript{33} It also allows students to provide contextualized information about the student social dynamics that can aid school staff in preventing bullying and correcting circumstances that are close to becoming bullying.

Immediate assistance and caring support can help students manage the effects of bullying. A school environment where teachers and staff are well-trained to support students can help students after incidents of bullying. Some basic steps to support students who have been bullied include: actively listening, assuring the student it wasn’t their fault, asking the child what he/she needs, providing advice, helping them form a plan to resolve the situation, committing to persistent support, and following-up timely.\textsuperscript{34}

It is also critical that bystanders intervene whenever instances of bullying occur. One study from 2001 found that when bystanders intervene, bullying stopped within 10 seconds 57\% of the time.\textsuperscript{35} Bystander intervention is an important strategy for addressing bullying. Even passive bystanders unintentionally promote bullying and harassment by providing the bully with an audience and allowing the hurtful behavior to continue. Teaching children and youth to intervene directly or seek help is an important means to address bullying in schools.\textsuperscript{36} There are other useful techniques for how to intervene in bullying, with a collection of techniques available on the U.S. Government’s anti-bullying website, available at \url{https://www.stopbullying.gov/respond/on-the-spot/index.html}. Some of the main techniques include: getting another adult to help; separate the kids involved; make sure everyone is safe; meet any immediate medical or mental health needs; stay calm; reassure the kids involved, including other bystanders; model respectful behavior when you intervene. Additional resources that educate and empower adults and students alike to intervene when bullying occurs, such as the recent Burger King anti-bullying campaign that features compelling short videos, can be can be leveraged or similarly created.\textsuperscript{37}

4) Addressing Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination in NYC Schools and Efforts to Improve School Climate

While the NYC Department of Education has implemented and taken numerous efforts to address bullying, harassment, and discrimination as well as efforts to improve school climate, there is still more work to be done to ensure all students feel safe and supported in their school environments.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Preventing Bullying: through science, policy, and practice}. See also “Here’s How to Reduce Bullying at Your Kid’s School.”

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Stopbullying.gov} (website). “Support the Kids Involved.” Available at \url{https://www.stopbullying.gov/respond/support-kids-involved/index.html}.


\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Eyes on Bullying} (website). “What Can You Do – Bystander.” Available at \url{http://www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html}.

This is perhaps more important now than ever when many children and youth are feeling anxiety related to the immigration status of themselves or family members. It is imperative that we make sure New York City students feel safe and free from any form of discrimination or ridicule so that they are best able to learn.

CCC offers the following recommendations to better address bullying, harassment, discrimination, and school climate in NYC public schools:

A. *Ensure all students receive and understand the code of conduct, including the discipline code and the students bill of rights.*

New York City has many thorough, thoughtful and important policies and procedures on paper. For these to be effective tools, students, parents, teachers, principals, guidance counselors, and other school personnel must be aware that these documents and policies exist. CCC was recently at an event with the Borough Student Advisory Council members and none of the young people there had previously known about or seen the code of conduct.

Thus, an important step for New York City public schools is to ensure that students receive and understand these important policies and that they know where to go for help if they are feeling bullied, harassed or discriminated against.

B. *Pass City Council Legislation aimed at strengthening accountability, information and supports to parents, teachers and students to prevent bullying, harassment, and discrimination and better support students.*

i. *Int. 1538-2017, an act to amend the administrative code to require DOE to list on its website the name and contact information of the designated respect for all liaison at each school.*

CCC supports Int. 1538-2017, which would require the Department of Education to list on its website the name and contact information of the designated liaison for bullying prevention at each school, and we urge the Council to pass this bill. The Dignity for All Students Act requires all schools to have a designated Dignity Act Coordinator. The name and contact information for this coordinator should be widely and easily accessible for families and others to contact when they have concerns about bullying. This type of modest change is a positive step towards ensuring youth know where to turn when they need help.

ii. *Int. 1565-A-2017, an act to amend the administrative code to require the DOE to distribute information regarding educational rights and departmental policies related to interactions with non-local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities*

CCC supports Int. 1565-A-2017, which would require the DOE to distribute information regarding educational rights and policies related to non-local law enforcement and federal
immigration authorities, and urges the City Council to pass it. Unfortunately, access to and understanding this information is more important than ever. Many NYC school children are rightfully full of anxiety and fear for themselves and their families. Having information, including information about privacy rights and access to legal information is critical to supporting immigrant students during this difficult time.

iii. **Int. 1638-2017, an act to amend the administrative code in relation to requiring the DOE to report on gay-straight or gender-sexuality alliance organizations.**

CCC supports Int. 1638-2017, which would require the DOE to report for each middle and high school whether the school has a gay-straight alliance or gender-sexuality alliance, as well as information about any trainings related to supporting LGBTQ youth. Gay-straight and gender-sexuality alliance organizations provide positive support networks for youth in schools who have historically been unsupported. Moreover, LGBTQ students have also been the victims of bullying, harassment, and discrimination in greater proportions and these organizations have helped combat these realities and support students who have been victims. We are encouraged that these types of organizations have become more prevalent in more schools and have grown in participation, but ensuring these organizations can continue to expand and be available to all students requires additional effort from DOE and other organizations. This bill would positively allow DOE and the public know where gay-straight and gender-sexuality alliances are absent so that work can be done to address these absences. The information about the trainings around LGBTQ issues is additionally useful as it more information can ensure adequate resources and attention is being given to this important topic.

iv. **T2017-6825, an act to amend the administrative code in relation to requiring the DOE to report information on student-to-student harassment and bullying.**

CCC supports T2017-6825, which would require the DOE to report every six months on the number of incidents of student-to-student bullying, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination, as well as several other school activities related to incidents and complaints of bullying. As stated earlier, the current data around bullying is unfortunately lacking. CCC supports efforts to more accurately track and understand the realities facing students in school, and this bill positively addresses this through regular reporting.

v. **Res. 1442-2017, a resolution calling upon the DOE to provide curricular and other supports to protect LGBTQNC and other vulnerable students and to ensure that administrators, teachers, and students in all middle and high schools are informed, under the Equal Access Act, students have a right to convene and participate in a Gender-Sexuality Alliance at school.**

CCC supports resolution 1442-2017, which would ask DOE to provide information and better publicize information that supports LGBTQNC youth, including their right to participate in gender-sexuality alliances. These youth deserve adequate support from school personnel in their educational and social development, and they deserve to know they can participate in gender-sexuality alliances, which can provide exceptionally
positive supports for LGBTQTNC youth. The DOE should do its best to ensure students can take advantage of these helpful resources and opportunities, and this resolution can demonstrate the City Council’s commitment to this idea.

C. Better track incidents of bullying.

As stated earlier, the Dignity for All Students Act requires schools to report all incidents of bullying, yet New York City schools are reporting exceedingly low numbers despite surveys and audits showing higher rates of bullying. CCC recommends that the DOE work with its schools to better understand why the reported incidents seem low and then to address these obstacles. While bullying might be hard to track, accurate information can provide DOE and schools with a better understanding of how students are doing in their schools, allowing them to better protect students who are bullied and better address the individual school environment.

D. Baseline and increase funding for restorative practices.

CCC once again thanks the City Council for its investment and restoration of $1.3 million to schools for restorative practices and the Mayor for the additional investment of $1.1 million in FY18. The $1.3 million from City Council funding will continue to fund 25 schools to have dedicated restorative practice personnel and extra training to implement restorative practices throughout their schools, and the Mayor’s addition will allow this program to expand to additional schools. CCC will be urging the administration to at a minimum baseline this $2.4 million and add additional funding so that more schools can benefit from this initiative.

E. Continue implementing the Mayor’s Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline recommendations.

In 2015, the Administration began the Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline, led by former Chief Judge Judith Kaye and including the Department of Education, NYPD, ACS, and many representatives from education, community, and children’s rights organizations, such as CCC. The Leadership Team was charged to make recommendations to improve school climate and reduce suspensions in NYC’s schools. The Leadership Team conducted its work in two phases, with recommendations published for each phase. The set of recommendations from these two set of recommendations represent a thoughtful, researched, and comprehensive set of policies and practices that help create supportive and safe school climates with effective responses to student misbehavior. Some of the key principles included recommendations that embrace positive supports to student discipline, improve school climate, promote de-escalation techniques, increase mental health supports, better track and report school climate and safety indicators, and improve supports for youth with past behavior problems. CCC recommends the

39 Id.
Administration, Department of Education, and City Council continue their commitment to use these recommendations as the framework for improving school climate and safety issues, which can be particularly useful in addressing instances of bullying.

**Summer Meals**

CCC is pleased that this hearing is also addressing summer meals. The summer meals program provides free summer meals to any NYC child under 18, regardless of any other factor. For many low-income students, access to free summer meals is a critical means to ensure they are able to both eat and eat healthy during the summer when school is out.

The City Council is considering two very important pieces of legislation that would help ensure that children and their families are aware of where free summer meals will be available, and would require the DOE to provide data on the take-up rates for summer meals and other school lunch programs.

**Pass Int. 0461-2014 to allow families to more easily participate in summer meals.**

CCC urges the City Council to pass Int. 0461-2014, which would require the Department of Education to make public the locations where summer meals will be provided by no later than June 1st of each year. Summer meals are a vital resource for students and families and the city’s provision are a great service for communities. When the locations for these meals are provided very late however, families cannot make the necessary arrangements to take advantage of these meals, are unaware of where the meals are located, or are discouraged from seeking them out. The city already provides these meals, it should thus make it as easy as possible for families to participate. This bill would address this by allowing families to know where the meal will be with enough time to plan to participate and enough information to make it easy. The locations do not often change, so requiring the publication of the locations earlier should not be unnecessarily burdensome for the Department of Education to finalize these sites and publicize their locations earlier.

**Pass Int. 773-2015 to require DOE to provide data regarding student participation in school meals programs.**

Now that breakfast, lunch and summer meals are all free, there should no longer be a financial barrier to student participation in school meals programs. Annual reports showing take-up rates, will help advocates, providers and schools better understand where there are barriers to take-up such as the quality of the food, knowledge of the free programs and/or the climate of the school cafeteria. Publicly reporting data will help hold DOE and others accountable and help advocates see where more attention is needed.

In conclusion, CCC is grateful to the City Council for its commitment to addressing school climate and reducing bullying in New York’s schools, as well as to school meals. We look
forward to working with you to support our schools and create safer, more supportive learning environments.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.