



Testimony of

Alice Bufkin  
Director of Policy for Child and Adolescent Health  
Citizens' Committee for Children

Presented to the  
New York City Council  
Committee on Education

***Oversight:***  
***New York City Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget: Education***

March 20, 2019

Good afternoon. My name is Alice Bufkin and I am the Director of Policy for Child and Adolescent Health at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. 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 Chair Treyger and all the members of the Education Committee for holding today's hearing on the City Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget. CCC appreciates this opportunity to testify.

CCC has analyzed the impact that the FY20 Preliminary Budget proposals would have on New York's children and families (a full analysis is available here: <https://www.cccnewyork.org/data-and-reports/publications/cfy20-prelimsummary/>). On the positive side, the Preliminary Budget proposes investments in Fair Fares reduced-price Metrocards; 3-K expansion; strategies to reduce and address childhood exposure to lead; healthcare expansions for NYC residents; investments in implicit bias training for city agency workers; and funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program. These are positive and needed investments.

Sadly, however, the City's FY20 Preliminary Budget once again fails to fund summer programs for over 34,000 middle school students; does not address salary parity for teachers and staff in community-based early childhood programs; would eliminate Bridging the Gap, a program that has added MSWs to schools with high rates of homeless students; and fails to fund a wide range of City Council initiatives that have historically provided community-based services for addressing health and mental health disparities, housing instability, food and income insecurity, school climate and youth development needs, and the needs of immigrants and poor New Yorkers needing legal assistance.

Moreover, the Mayor has required every city agency (except for the public housing authority) to identify budget savings that will collectively add up to \$750 million, and a detailed plan for these savings will be included in the City's Executive Budget when it is released in April.

In these challenging times, our testimony seeks to draw attention to the needs of children and youth and to identify priorities that the City administration and City Council should champion as you move into the budget negotiation process.

### 1) **Better support homeless students.**

CCC urges the Administration to make additional investments in the Executive Budget to better support the nearly 115,000 homeless students in public schools. In addition, the administration must at a minimum restore, baseline, and increase the \$13.9 million of one year funding for the Bridging the Gap Initiative that currently funds social workers and literacy programs for homeless students.

Given both the increasing numbers of homeless students and their high absentee rates, we believe the administration must do better to address the needs of homeless students. On an average day, there are 12,619 families with children in shelter each day in NYC, a 28% increase from 2013. Approximately one in ten NYC public school children is living in shelter, doubled up, or in foster care, with 114,659 students homeless at some point during the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>1</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. "Family Homelessness in New York City." March 2019.

trauma and stress of homelessness, coupled with educational instability, high absenteeism rates, and/or long commutes to school, has proven to negatively impact educational outcomes.

A 2018 report by CCC and Advocates for Children (AFC) provided additional findings and recommendations for homeless students. As we reported, for students living in shelters, 53% missed more than one month of school in unscheduled absences. The educational outcomes for these students are extremely low, with 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency rates at 15% for ELA and 12% in math. Additionally, 10% of middle and high school students living in shelters were suspended from school.<sup>2</sup>

CCC joins Advocates for Children in urging the administration to take a multi-pronged approach to improve outcomes for homeless students.

**First, the administration must restore and baseline the \$13.9 million for Bridging the Gap support services for homeless students, which includes 69 social workers in schools with high rates of homeless students.** The administration has consistently funded this initiative one year at a time, despite recognizing the critical importance of these providers. It is destabilizing to the social workers themselves to not know whether they will have a job after June, as well as to the homeless students developing relationships with the social workers who do not know if they will be back in the fall. The Bridging the Gap initiative must not be subjected to the budget dance.

**Second, the City should expand the Bridging the Gap social worker program from 69 to 100 social workers at schools with high rates of students living in homeless settings.** These social workers were placed in schools with high rates of students living in shelters, yet there are 100 schools with 50 or more students living in shelter who do not have a Bridging the Gap social worker. The City should expand the Bridging the Gap program to a total of 100 schools to begin to address the needs of these students in more schools.

**Third, the City should invest \$500,000 to establish an Education Support Center at PATH.** PATH is the City's shelter intake center, where every family applying for shelter must wait to be placed in and transported to a shelter. Currently, there are only three DOE staff members at PATH, and these staff only meet with parents who proactively request to speak with them. They are also unavailable over the weekends or at night.

The City has an important opportunity to speak with parents about their educational options while they are waiting at PATH. The City should launch an education support center at PATH that would ensure a DOE staff member shares information with every family who participates in shelter intake process. This staff can help identify and address barriers to school attendance and provide families with critical information about how to access educational services. This Education Support Center should be staffed by a DOE manager and six full-time DOE members with staggered schedules.

**Fourth, the City should invest \$1 million to increase the number of Students in Temporary Housing Central and Regional Managers.** Regional managers focus on serving students in temporary housing, with responsibilities including supporting community coordinators and assisting schools, families, and shelter staff. The City should add at least 4 Regional Managers for a total of 22 Regional Managers, and add at least 2 Central Managers to help ensure the Students in Temporary Housing program is effective.

---

<sup>2</sup> Advocates for Children of New York and Citizens' Committee for Children. "Recommendations for Improving School Access and Success for Rising Numbers of Students in Temporary Housing." March 2018.

## **2) Better support the needs of foster care children.**

Approximately 56,000 New York City students are in foster care. We join Advocates for Children in urging the administration to take additional steps to help ensure these children have the supports they need in school.

### **First, invest \$5 million to provide bus transportation for K-6<sup>th</sup> Grade students in foster care.**

Foster children are entitled to remain at their school of origin (if it is safe) when they are placed into foster care. This often requires busing. Two federal laws, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (2008) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), require local school districts and child welfare agencies to collaborate on a plan to provide, arrange, and fund transportation so that students can remain in their school of origin when they enter foster care or change foster homes, if it is in their best interest to do so.

If no existing bus route is available, transportation is left up to the foster parent or foster care agency. Often, foster parents and foster care case planners are unable to transport children to and from school every day. Transporting one child to and from a school located far away from the foster home (which may be far away from the foster care agency as well) could easily take a case planner four hours per day, transforming their job into one of a transportation chaperone and making it impossible to perform all of their other required tasks.

Without bus service, many young children in foster care are forced to transfer schools even though such a transfer is not in their best interests. When students are removed from their homes and families, school is often the only source of stability in their lives. Unfortunately, 44% of NYC students in foster care changed schools at least once during the 2016-2017 school year. We urge the administration to meet the legal requirements and do what is best for these students by adding \$5 million to ensure busing is available to every foster child in need of busing to and from school.

### **Second, invest \$1.5 million to establish a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care.**

Homeless students face unique barriers to accessing quality education, and there is a clear need for more coordination and collaboration between schools, foster care agencies, and families. In March 2018, the City's Interagency Foster Care Task Force recommended that the DOE establish an infrastructure to focus on students in foster care, similar to the DOE's Office of Students in Temporary Housing. We support establishing an office that would train and support school staff on the needs and rights of students in foster care; communicate and monitor implementation of policies related to students in foster care; and serve as a point person for schools, families, and welfare professionals. We urge the City to hire a central manager and policy advisor to work across agencies to improve outcomes for foster children and their families.

## **3) Establish Salary Parity for Early Educators and ensure a smooth and positive transition of EarlyLearn from ACS to DOE.**

New York City's early education system is currently undergoing major changes with the expansion of Universal 3-K and the transition of EarlyLearn early childhood programs from ACS to DOE. This budget offers an opportunity to make critical, necessary investments in a strong birth-to-five early education system. However, with the exception of funding for 1,900 new 3-K seats in the Bronx and Brooklyn, the budget fails to make needed investments in the early care system. In particular, the

FY20 budget fails to invest in salary parity, despite the opportunity provided as the city commences rebidding the entire contracted early education system.

CBO early childhood teachers earn significantly less than DOE teachers with the same level of education, with first-year BA-certified CBO teachers earning \$42,000 compared to \$57,000 for a DOE teacher with the same education level and credentials. Teacher salary for MA certified CBO teachers their first year is \$47,000, compared to \$65,000 for their counterparts at DOE. After 8 years on the job, a BA teacher at a CBO would earn \$44,000 and an MA teacher would earn \$49,000, compared to their DOE peers who would earn \$77,000 with a BA and \$85,000 with a Masters.<sup>3</sup> As the Mayor continues to emphasize equity in education, it is important to recognize that Black and Latina women are the backbone of the CBO early education workforce, and are disproportionately impacted by salary disparities.

Notably, the job is the same except that the teachers in CBOs also work from 3-6 PM and during the summer months, meaning that the CBO staff earn less money while working more hours. This has caused challenges for CBOs as their experienced staff continue to leave for jobs in DOE schools. As the administration creates new Pre-K and 3K classrooms in schools, there are more opportunities for CBO staff to work for the DOE, further compounding the problem. It is in the best interest of system stability, the workforce, the children, and communities served to achieve salary parity.

The city administration is in the process of rebidding the entire contracted early education system, with the expectation that new contracts for Universal PreK, 3-K, and subsidy-eligible infant and toddler care will be announced next fall and will come online in July 2021. In addition to failing to fund salary parity, the new RFP fails to fund a number of other key areas that are necessary for a seamless 0-5 system.

First, the new RFP does not include cost escalation, meaning reimbursement remains flat for the full contract term, even if costs trend up over time. Second, the RFP does not consider extended and year-round services as “core,” leading to disparities in funding for these important hours of care, and a potential bifurcation in quality. Third, the RFP returns reimbursement to a “pay for enrollment” structure that guarantees reimbursement for only 72% of costs. And finally, the RFP fails to pay for indirect costs like rent.

Each of these areas must be addressed if New York wants to ensure a successful, high-quality early care system for children.

#### **4) Expand and support initiatives that improve school climate.**

Every New York City student deserves an educational environment where they can focus on their work and experience positive, safe, and healthy relationships. School settings can play a critical role in meeting the behavioral health needs of children and providing them with the supportive environment they need to thrive. Unfortunately, schools throughout New York City remain under-resourced, and too many children lack adequate supports both inside and outside of school. We join Advocates for Children in urging the City to make investments that improve school climates citywide and help combat the school-to-prison pipeline.

---

<sup>3</sup> Citizens’ Committee for Children. “Salary Disparities in NYC’s Early Childhood Education Workforce.” February 2019.

**First, we urge the City to invest \$20 million to add 150 full-time social workers for high-needs schools, as well as supervising social workers to help bring NYC closer to recommended ratios.**

Social workers play a critical role in addressing the social and behavioral health needs of students, a need that is particularly evident given inadequate mental health services available to New York City students. However, social workers in NYC deal with overwhelming caseloads, with a ratio of 769 students for every full-time social worker. In contrast, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends a ratio of one social worker per 250 students in all schools and one social worker for every 50 students in high-needs schools. Almost half (744) of all NYC schools had no full-time social worker.

In addition to new investments in high-needs schools, we believe the budget should also phase in an additional expansion of school social workers each year in order to bring the ratio up to at least one full-time social worker for 250 students.

We also encourage the City Council and administration to explore increasing supports for Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs). BCBAs work specifically with children with developmental or behavioral issues, enabling them to provide a level of targeted support that not all social workers are able to provide.

**Second, CCC urges the administration to add \$30 million in the Executive Budget to launch and sustain a Mental Health Support Continuum Pilot in 100 high-needs schools.** This proposal is based on the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline's 2016 Recommendations.<sup>4</sup> These recommendations included strategies to address in-school environment and student behavior to promote a safe learning setting for everyone, one that ensures students who misbehave or make a mistake are provided the supports to stay engaged in school for their academic and social well-being. CCC believes the thoughtful recommendations should be funded and implemented.

The Mayor's Leadership Team identified the best strategy to address this issue as piloting a mental health network in schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn. The Mayor's Leadership Team laid out a comprehensive set of specific proposals for these pilot schools that all center on providing clinical and evidence-based mental health services to students with identified behavior problems. These programs will directly address some of the most challenging scenarios facing New York's schools in a comprehensive and positive approach that will benefit every student in those schools, provide transformative support to students who are most in need, and provide the framework for scaling the program to other schools through the pilot model.

Building on the recommendations of the Mayor's Leadership Team, we urge the City to launch and sustain a Mental Health Continuum involving school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics and call-in centers to assist 100 high-needs schools with students in crisis, school response teams that help students get direct mental health services, whole-school training in the evidence-based model of Collaborative Problem Solving, and program evaluation.

**Third, we urge the City to invest \$30 million to expand whole-school restorative practices citywide.** We commend the City Council's leadership in funding the initial restorative practices

---

<sup>4</sup> The Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline. "Maintaining the Momentum: A Plan for Safety and Fairness in Schools." July 2016.

pilot program in 25 schools. Restorative practices help build healthy school communities, promoting inclusiveness, relationship-building, and problem-solving to help address student behavior and reduce harmful disciplinary practices. The successes provided this program should now be expanded citywide. We recommend the FY20 budget include and baseline \$30 million for whole-school Restorative Practices in 100 high-needs schools. This funding would increase staffing at the central DOE office and Borough Field Support Centers, as well as pay for a full-time Restorative Practices coordinator in each high-needs school.

## **5) Improve the expansion of universal school meals.**

After many years of advocacy and much support from the City Council, the administration finally implemented universal free lunch to all NYC public school students in the fall of 2017. According to a March 2019 report by Community Advocates, 26,000 more students are now eating lunch every day, with a 16.1% increase for high school students.<sup>5</sup>

While DOE has been working hard to advertise and implement free lunch, too many parents and students remain unaware that free school lunch is available. Recent federal policy proposals such as the Public Charge rule have made many immigrant families afraid to access many safety net programs. Because school programs are often viewed as “safer,” maximizing use of universal school lunch is an important way to increase nutritional supports for vulnerable children. There are still some barriers that, if addressed, would further increase student take-up for lunch.

**First, the City should provide \$3 million in dedicated funds to promote school lunch initiatives.** A sustained communications and marketing plan will help ensure universal school lunch is a reality.

**Second, the City should expand deli style serving areas to additional schools beyond the initial cohort of 26 schools.** In 2017, the Office of School Food began introducing new “deli style” serving areas where the school lunch foods are presented in a more appealing manner with students able to select their own foods at various stations. According to Community Food Advocates, schools that were enhanced in the 2016-17 school year saw a lunch participation increase of 30.1%, which is double the increase under universal school lunch for all high schools.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, CCC recommends that halal and kosher school meals should be available in schools with students who observe these dietary restrictions.

## **6) Restore, and where appropriate, baseline City Council Initiatives.**

The City Council’s leadership and commitment to education has been tremendous and instrumental to many thousands of students’ opportunity for a high-quality, well-rounded education. We are especially appreciative of the programs and services that the City Council funded last year, many of which the Council has a long history of supporting. We hope to see these programs restored and where appropriate baselined in the upcoming Executive Budget so that there is no need for the annual budget dance.

These include:

---

<sup>5</sup> Community Food Advocates. “Universal School Lunch in NYC Year One: Insights from High School Cafeterias.” March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

- \$500,000 for Child Mind Institute
- \$3.0 million for community schools
- \$2.485 for the Dropout Prevention and Intervention Initiative
- \$4.39 million for Educational Programs for Students, which includes programs such as Chess in the Schools, Expanded Schools and the Middle School Quality Initiative
- \$2.0 million for Guidance Counselors for All Schools
- \$250,000 for the Jill Chaifetz Helpline operated by Advocates for Children
- \$600,000 for LGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum
- \$1.925 million for Physical Education and Fitness
- \$20.805 million for Support for Educators, which includes Teacher’s Choice school supplies and the Executive Leadership Institute
- \$2.0 million for Support for Homeless Students, Bridging the Gap school-based social workers