Good afternoon. My name is Daryl Hornick-Becker and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Inc. CCC is a 75-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions.

I would like to thank Chair Treyger, and all the members of the City Council Education Committee for holding today’s hearing on remote learning and the impact of COVID-19 on the city’s schools.

The size of the city’s public education system – with 1,800 schools and 1.1 million students – poses immense challenges. It is widely understood that the city’s schools have made real progress over the last decade across a wide range of indicators, including graduation rates, dropout rates and ELA and Math test scores. However, profound disparities remain within those educational outcomes, and the system itself is still deeply segregated by race and ethnicity. These disparities have been exacerbated in the transition to remote learning, with students across many communities struggling to adjust without devices, internet access, adult guidance, or even adequate space at home to learn.

In addition to the challenges occurring during the current school year, drastic cuts proposed in the Executive Budget in education and youth services will present more challenged for the summer and next school year. As we being to recover from this crisis and parents seek to get back to work, not only will parents need child care options for younger children, but youth will also need access to programming and schools that combat learning loss and supports their social and emotional well-being.

In light of our current remote learning environment, and the summer and school year to come. CCC has highlighted several actions and restoration that need to be taken in order to ensure that the city’s 1.1 million school children and their families not only will recover and survive, but will thrive following this pandemic.

- **Fund summer youth programming as a vehicle for recovery**

New York City’s expansive system of after school programs are a vital part of New York’s human services sector and one of our city’s greatest assets. The Comprehensive After School System of New York City (COMPASS) which includes School’s Out NYC (SONYC), in addition to Cornerstone
programs in NYCHA housing and Beacon school-based programs, provide education, sports, recreation, art, games, and important skill-building opportunities to approximately 222,000 children every year. These programs are intertwined with the public school system to serve a significant portion of the city’s schoolchildren. During the school year, almost one third of the students considered in poverty according to the Dept. of Education participate in COMPASS, SONYC, Beacon or Cornerstone afterschool programs.

Just as important, these programs continue to serve youth over the summer after the school year ends. Summer programs integrate both experiential, academic instruction and social-emotional learning opportunities to make learning joyful, combat summer learning loss, and build the skills necessary for school success and healthy development.

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget eliminates all summer programming for youth, including the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), summer camps operated by the city’s Comprehensive Afterschool System & School’s Out NYC (COMPASS & SONYC), and summer programs run through Beacon and Cornerstone programs. In total, this will leave nearly 175,000 children in NYC with no options for summer engagement.
Some communities will be disproportionately affected by these cuts. In several areas of the Bronx, northern Manhattan and central Brooklyn, there are 20 – 40 program sites that may lose their summer offerings. Many of the same neighborhoods heavily-served by youth programs, are also neighborhoods that have had higher shares of positive COVID-19 tests than other areas of the city. These include East Harlem, East Tremont, Morrisania, Washington Heights, East New York, Brownsville, among others.

### Top 10 Community Districts with After School Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community District</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Harlem (M11)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower East Side (M03)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Heights (M12)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East New York (K05)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownsville (K16)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Stuyvesant (K03)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica/St. Albans (Q12)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concourse/Highbridge (B04)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Greene/Brooklyn Heights (K02)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrisania (B03)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COMPASS, SONYC, Cornerstone and Beacon Locations by Zip Code

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, after school programs have adapted how they engage children and serve their communities. The community-based organizations (CBOs) that run these programs have developed and implemented innovative new ways of providing youth with academic and social-emotional learning, as well as art and recreation programming.

Providers are currently helping families with the transition to remote learning, troubleshooting technology issues, engaging in remote arts instruction, and helping deliver meals to families suddenly food insecure, all through online videoconferences and apps or through phone calls and texts. All of these services must continue for the 178,000 students who will be taking remote classes this summer. The CBOs that serve these communities are intimately aware of the community’s needs, and stand ready to adapt to the new environment in order to provide youth with needed out-of-school engagement, and to prepare for the new school year.

Youth engagement over the summer will be vital to meeting the emerging educational, health and economic needs of children and families as a result of the public health and economic crisis. Summer programming as part of a recovery effort would address the following areas:

1. **Education**— helping students overcome learning loss from the move to remote-schooling through building and strengthening cognitive skills, project-based learning activities and/or workforce development opportunities.
2. **Social Emotional Health** – offering youth opportunities to build positive and rewarding relationships with others and strengthen their self-efficacy and resilience. This is even more
important now considering the compounded trauma of social isolation, potential loss of a loved one, loss of a family’s income, and housing and food insecurity.

3. Physical Health – providing opportunities for safe and regular physical activity and health and nutrition education, whether activities need to be socially-distanced or not.

4. Family and Home – supporting parents, caregivers, and families to help promote learning and healthy development in safe and stable homes.

Even with social-distancing measures in effect, many providers can still offer summer program alternatives that promote recovery. CBOs are ready to take the lead on designing and piloting new approaches to summer programming and services that can be adapted and implemented in response to our new reality.

COMPASS and SONYC programs serving younger youth can engage children in various ways at home, through education, arts, and recreation. If schools remain in session this summer, these programs can continue to deliver a full range of academic enrichment outside of school hours. For SYEP serving older youth, innovative remote assignments can provide employment opportunities that support training, career exploration, credentialing and skills development.

On the other hand, if social distancing measures are lifted this summer and businesses reopen, seasonal staff may be more crucial than ever, and summer programs can connect youth to critical ongoing and recovery-specific citywide initiatives, such as emergency food delivery, the DOE’s Regional Enrichment Centers, census outreach, community resource mapping, and voter registration efforts.

CCC and its partners in the Campaign for Children stand ready to work with the Administration and City Council to develop and implement creative solutions for youth programming this summer. The success of our efforts will ensure that children and youth of all ages are prepared for school reentry, and that they and their families benefit from the supports needed to recover from this unprecedented crisis.

- Expedite device delivery and expand REC enrollment

The Dept. of Education has made great progress since the transition to remote learning, distributing over 280,000 devices to students thus far, and opening and staffing Regional Enrichment Centers (RECs) for the children of essential workers. However, more can be done to address the challenges of distance learning right now. At the end of last month, an estimated 19,000 students who requested devices were still awaiting them. We also consistently hear of families who are exasperated in their attempts to get devices or technological guidance to help their children succeed. The DOE must expedite device delivery and continue to engage with families who need help as we enter the final month of the school year.

But for some students just having a device is not enough. More than 1 in 10 students in NYC schools lacked permanent housing last year. These students already had significant obstacles to educational success, but the move to remote learning has presented a set of new challenges. Students in temporary housing are more likely to lack the physical space to learn remotely where they live, especially those who might also have siblings who are remote-learning, and they may not have a caregiver present to help them set up their access or guide them through the day. That’s why CCC has joined with other advocates, the Comptroller, and members of the City Council to call on the DOE to allow students in temporary
housing access to the city’s Regional Enrichment Centers. These centers, created to serve children of essential workers during the crisis, thus far have been under-enrolled but could provide needy students with better-suited environments to learn remotely.

- **Limit cuts to the Fair Student Funding formula**

Representing almost a third of the city’s entire budget, the Dept. of Education is always a likely target for savings, even more so during our current budgetary crisis. However, reductions and disinvestments in public education, during a time when so many children will be combatting learning loss and experiencing trauma, will have both short-term and long-term negative impacts on child and family well-being. While many of the proposed cuts to education in the Executive Budget will be detrimental, none might be more harmful than the proposed $100 million reduction to the Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula.

FSF is the source of the majority of funding for individual school budgets. Any reduction in FSF will directly result in reductions in school resources, and will force principals to make brutal choices when it comes to the next school year. **Smaller school budgets could result in teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, fewer counselors and social workers, and fewer course options.** The Mayor has indicated that schools currently receiving higher allotments of FSF will be prioritized when making cuts, but these schools receive more funding because they need it, and thus the biggest cuts would be at schools with the most vulnerable students.

These cuts will come at a time when students are returning to school after falling behind during remote learning, after losing a loved one to COVID, or after suddenly losing income, housing and food security, or all of the above. These compounded effects will be worsened when these students return to underfunded schools with fewer teachers, larger classes, and less support. **CCC urges the City Council to work with the DOE and the Administration to prevent or limit these cuts, and find savings in other budget areas that may be less directly harmful to New York schoolchildren.**

- **Target resources for the most vulnerable students**

Because the budget outlook is bleak does not mean we can turn our backs on the most vulnerable populations of students. Before this crisis, there were profound disparities within educational outcomes among different groups of students. These disparities have only been exacerbated in the transition to remote learning, with students across many communities struggling to adjust. **Now more than ever, the Council needs to support programs that will directly address these students; students who already experienced worse educational outcomes before this crisis and whose needs will be even greater following it.** We know funding is limited but we urge the Council to support several low-cost initiatives that will target these students.

When school buildings reopen, the DOE must ensure that every student can get there. Federal and state law require the city to provide transportation to students placed in foster care so they can stay in their original school, unless it is in their best interest to transfer schools. Starting in the fall, the DOE may need to figure out how to make transportation work in light of social distancing requirements and the potential of staggered scheduling. Currently, there is also not a single staff member at the DOE focused full time on students in foster care. **We ask the City Council to ensure that the final budget includes sufficient funding for the DOE to provide bus service for the relatively small number of students in foster care.**
care who need it, as well as funding for at least one DOE senior staff member focused full-time on students in foster care.

Additionally, CCC and its partners in the NY Immigration Coalition’s Education Collaborative urge the City Council to support a 3-year, transfer school pilot for newly arrived, high-school-aged immigrants. While the City works to extend remote learning across the boroughs, we must remember that thousands of immigrant youth were not enrolled in school in the first place because they lacked access to programs that met their unique needs even before the crisis. Older immigrant youth consistently struggle to find adequate school placements, especially if they arrived after the age of 16. While budgetary difficulties will be exacerbated by the COVID 19 crisis, we cannot give up on these thousands of young people who deserve an opportunity to a meaningful education.

- **Continue to support students with disabilities and engage with their families**

  We know that this period of remote learning has been difficult for students and families. We also know that the staff in the central DOE offices – as well as educators at many schools – have been working hard to make remote learning and services possible. That said, CCC and its partners in the ARISE coalition have seen many challenges in providing instruction and services to students with disabilities during remote learning. Examples include families with children whose special education needs mean they function below their chronological grade who are being given work meant for students at their age level – making it impossible for those students to complete the work and causing frustration for the students and their parents. Other families have reported that their children are getting all their work through assignments to do independently with no live instruction or meaningful teacher interaction. In addition, there are families whose children are not yet receiving all of their mandated related services remotely and who have not been asked for input into their children’s Remote Learning Plans.

  Students with disabilities are at particular risk of falling behind during this time of remote learning, and their needs are greater than those of their general education peers. They are also more likely to rely on in-person adult support—meaning that a student’s ability to benefit from the instruction and services offered during remote learning often depends on their parent’s availability, language, resources, and technology skills. The DOE has made progress in adapting special education plans to the remote learning environment during this school year, and we ask that they continue this important work over the summer school period and into the next school year with particular focus on ensuring parents and caregivers are engaged in the process.

- **Integrate early intervention and behavioral health care into child care settings and prioritize preschool special education**

  CCC was heartened to see no substantial cuts to early childhood education in the Executive Budget, outside of the delay in 3K expansion. High quality affordable child care is vital to reopening our economy and getting people back to work, but it is also one of the most important investments we can make in improving outcomes for the next generation; a generation that will be defined by this crisis. While families have been sheltering in place due to social distancing requirements, many children have gone without critical Early Intervention or preschool special education services.

  Earlier this year the city projected it would need approximately 1,000 to 2,000 additional seats for preschoolers who need a special class setting; classes with smaller sizes led by teachers trained to educate
students with disabilities.iii When schools reopen in the fall these students still may not have an appropriate class setting. CCC and other advocates are asking that the DOE fulfill its legal obligation and provide a preschool special class seat to every child whose IEP requires one— either by opening more DOE-run classes or by ensuring CBOs do so.

The city must also explore strategies to operationalize the integration of proven best practices at scale in early childhood settings to reach children and families most in need. Following Hurricane Sandy, many providers put in place trauma-informed training and curriculum models to address issues related to loss of life, loss of income, and displacement that many children and families experienced. Lessons learned can be applied to COVID-19 recovery efforts and brought to scale, including funding discussions with philanthropic groups if warranted.

It is estimated that the city may be receiving $80 to $100 million in federal child care resources from the CARES Act. These resources can be leveraged to support the developmental needs of young children with a keen eye toward trauma-informed approaches, as well as targeted investments to support extended day options for children (3 to 6pm), protect infant and toddler capacity, and to continue to serve the essential workforce.

We recognize the enormous challenge facing the city in light of the economic downturn, as well as due to inadequate investments in education from the State, and CCC stands ready to support the city in advocating with State and Federal leaders to ensure New York City and our families and communities receive the supports so desperately needed. Those families hardest hit by COVID-19 are the same families that will suffer the most from budget cuts. We look forward to working with the City Council to strengthen the educational and youth services that will be necessary to recovery.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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